# ACROSS THE BRIDGES

ALEXANDER PATERSON

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# ACROSS THE BRIDGES

OR

## LIFE BY THE SOUTH LONDON RIVER-SIDE

BY

ALEXANDER PATERSON

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THE
RIGHT REV. E. S. TALBOT, D.D.
LORD BISHOP OF WINCHESTER

NEW EDITION
SIXTH IMPRESSION

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TO

MY MOTHER,

A GUARDIAN OF THE POOR

# INTRODUCTION

By the Right Rev. the Lord Bishop of Southwark

Few, if any, who begin this book will wish to put it down. There is no interest like the interest of human life, and of that the book is full. It is human life in a form remote from the experience of most readers, yet near to them both locally and by moral claim. Its features are seen at first hand by an observer with a quick eye, a steady judgment, and more than a grain of humour. It is sketched with a ready pen, in terse English, with touches of finish in detail, and of colour in lively illustration. Here is the material out of which romances of street and slum life might be made, but it is served up to us without the flavourings and combinations which romances need, but which spoil them as documents of life.

I am allowed, as they say in the theatres, to 'present' this piece and to introduce the author. To many who know the men by whom the best work in London is done he needs no introduction, but others should be told by someone who knows his gifts and honours his manhood and character, how he has gained what he here gives. He has spent years of work in their clubs upon the boys of one

of the most crowded and difficult regions of South London. He has worked as an assistant teacher (being himself a University graduate) in an Elementary Council School in order to see from within the working upon the boys of the mental and moral influences of the school; in summer camps he has shared and disciplined their play; through their lives he has passed into the heart of the families from which they come; and, as a tenement-dweller himself, he has come into daily and hourly contact with all the ways of that life.

I am sanguine that in this brief description of book and author I have said enough to induce many to taste what Mr. Paterson offers them; and if so, their appetite will grow for what he has to say. That in itself will be great gain. There is no lack of sympathy in English hearts; there is a great lack of mutual knowledge in different classes. The increase of such knowledge is among the very first of our national needs. For many these pages may do something in this way, but for some—and I would fain hope not a few—they will do more. For they come out of the heart of one of those efforts by which of late years men of our Universities and schools have sought to come personally into touch with the lives of the workers, the hard-pressed, and the unemployable. "Across the Bridges," as Mr. Paterson says, "there is a great need." I hope and think that he will lead more of our young men and women, before life's ties, professional and domestic, compass them about, to see for themselves, as dwellers for a while among the poor streets, "how the poor live." They will learn thereby much that 'gives furiously to

think.' They will do not a little good. But perhaps the best gain will be an enlargement of their own equipment for citizenship, such as comes from an increase of reverence for, and sympathy with, the struggling and suffering lives of their fellow-citizens, and from understanding what the problems are—deeper and greater than many political issues—which those lives create for the conscience and energies of the nation.

EDW. SOUTHWARK.

Bishop's House,
Kennington, S.E.
*March* 9, 1911.

# PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

It has been suggested by readers of the book that certain adverse criticisms of elementary education, which appear in its pages, arise entirely from a knowledge of the school which accepted me for one year as a supernumerary assistant teacher. The chance has come to deny that.

The last few years have been spent among a number of boys, proceeding from a great variety of schools. While working and playing with them, listening and observing, many general criticisms and conclusions on elementary education have slowly formed. They do not apply to any one school in particular.

There is one passage (in Chapter VI.) which is a direct memory of the work done by Mr. W. Brown and his staff in the direction of organized games. With the exception of that passage, the chapters on school-life must be taken as a composite account of education in the poorest parts.

He would be a poor specimen of an "old boy," and a traitor to the motto of the school—"Play up, play up, and play the game"—who repaid the shelter of its walls, and the friendship so freely offered there, by attacking it in public. Rather is my debt so large, that I must always remember it with affection, and speak of it with praise.

The issue of a second edition has provided an opportunity to make sundry corrections and withdrawals, especially in the passages relating to common lodging-houses.

A. P.

*February*, 1912.

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# ACROSS THE BRIDGES

## CHAPTER I

### STREETS AND HOMES

It is said by the man who goes down the Strand that across the bridges of the Thames there lies a quarter of London where it is not possible to find a good tailor or a big hotel. Yet in this seeming desert, which stretches for eight miles along the banks of the river, live all but two millions of mothers and fathers and children. Their life is full of incident, yet not adventurous. Goodness abounds, but there is little greatness. Few memorable buildings exist on the south bank to attract sightseers from the country or the colonies. Few streets seem suited for a royal procession. Even the best features have the sombreness of the second-rate. The part that lies closest to the river is far poorer than the rest. On these streets poverty has set a seal, and its many problems have sunk their tangled roots deep into the life of the people. It is of the hopes and troubles that come to those who live here that these pages would speak. They will be content to trace the life of the average man by the river-side, to show his worth and possibilities, and will fall far short of suggesting the remedies which might transform his character and chances.

The scene might well open on a Saturday night, when the streets will seem full of every happiness that is known to tired people in their leisure hours. Every road and every public-house and shop is full of busy people. Gra mo-

phones and costermongers fill the air with noise. There is much to buy and see and talk about. A score of different pleasures, that may be obtained for twopence, assail the passer-by. Bedtime can well be postponed on such a night as this, and it is indeed late before the streets grow empty.

Sunday morning sees a strange transformation. The roads are deserted, save for the few who hurry to church, or the boys who poke Sunday newspapers under the doors, or hang up milk-cans on the nails so thoughtfully fixed in the wall of the few houses that can afford the luxury. All the world is asleep, for pleasure tires as much as work, and, after all, " there's nothing to be done on Sunday morning." The only cry in the street is that of the milkman or some hoarse veteran selling old issues of the comic papers at five for a penny.

It is on such a morning that the street is at its worst. Saturday night's marketing has left many traces. Where stalls have filled a third of the roadway, the pavements are full of despised fragments. Half-sheets of pink evening papers, bought so lightly and read so laboriously, and in the end serving to hold a pennyworth of fried fish and chip potatoes, are hurried along the gutter by some early breeze. Here, too, lie outer leaves of vegetables, and the bones of some fish that was eaten by a lad sauntering home just before midnight. Empty cigarette packets and the red matches that are very cheap and almost as uncertain as the French ones, are signs that Saturday was pay-day. In other streets, where stalls have never established a prescriptive right, the litter still prevails. Bits of clothing that once were rags, but now have passed that stage, boots that will no longer hold a foot even with the help of string, lie about the roadway. They have been dropped or thrown there a little thoughtlessly, for each house has a large tin dustbin where these grim relics of poverty may be hidden. Sometimes a fight may explain the old black bonnet, with greasy velvet and only one string, or it may be the ecstasy of abandonment which bewitches a drunken woman.

Throughout Sunday, and perhaps for longer, the streets are in this disorder, reminding the observer how sadly the smaller virtues of tidiness and order are forgotten in the course of a hard life, and how little pride is felt for a mean street by those who live in it.

In the suburbs the very absurdity of the names given to the roads and houses proclaims the pride of the householder. The man from villadom is proud of his school, which has turned out two Members of Parliament and half a dozen councillors; proud of his firm, which "does a bigger trade in French rabbit-skins than any other firm in the market"; proud of his friends; proud of his flowers, his garden-roller, and that quiet terrace of houses of which he rents but a fortieth part. He will not allow fish-bones or bonnet-strings to lie ten yards from the gate of Laburnum Villa. But in the river-side streets pride finds little place. Neither the name nor the condition of the street would suggest that anyone living there cared for this row of houses more than for any other. Thus the vicious circle of cause and effect is completed; for it is because pride has had a fall and died away that the places where men live have grown ugly and squalid, till now there is little or nothing to be proud of, and none can justly blame the indifference of the householder. The growth of local government is undoubtedly producing a slow, corporate self-consciousness, which is often betrayed into unwise and inartistic extravagances, but will lead ultimately to better things. In the meanwhile the extent of the reforms accomplished is a little deceptive. The main streets, where comparatively few people live, are often paved with wood, and cleansed more regularly, though the untidy Sunday will be long endured and with great difficulty overcome. The side-streets, with their long rows of four or six roomed houses, each holding some fifteen to twenty people, the courts and alleys and squares, are allowed to keep their dust and rubbish lying outside for days and days together. It may rot and smell, or flutter and roll about, but the

public eye is not so generally offended. It is still the outside which is first to be cleansed.

The small street, already noisy enough by very reason of its narrowness, must still retain the cobbles and setts of last century, while the macadam and wood is saved to please the ears of a wider and more powerful public. Once things are dirty, or noisy, or untidy, or unattractive, everything conspires to increase the failing and weaken the powers of natural resistance.

Apart from dust and rubbish, the streets lack beauty or shape. They are long, but not wide enough to be impressive ; and where the monotony is broken for the purposes of advertisement, it might with advantage have been preserved. Occasionally an old churchyard, now administered by the local authority, offers a sight of green trees and tulips. Here are aged folk on iron seats, securely guarded by uniformed attendants and notice-boards, for fear they may snatch wildly at a crocus, or roll on the grass for very joy at having reached the pensionable age. An open space, just large enough to surround a bandstand, where there is music once or twice a week, will break the line.

One of these was espied by a small girl from a tramcar. " What is that ? Look, daddy !" she asked, and pulled the good man's sleeve just as he was lighting his pipe. The man looked, and then lit his pipe, looked again, and said, with the pride of a ratepayer :

" That is a recreation-ground."

" What is that ?" still pursued the girl.

" A place where you play games, in the manner of speaking. That's what a recreation-ground is, as you might say."

The tram still stood stationary opposite the empty bandstand and its ring of forms and chairs, and the girl was looking hard, and her mind busy making pictures.

" What sorts of games do you play there ?" was the final thrust.

The man looked once again, took his evening paper from

his pocket, spat over the side of the tram, and settled down to read. This is a question which all men are asking the lords of the earth. Some day an answer must be given.

Apart from these rather limited delights, the streets can offer little recreation. The advertisement hoardings provide every colour and pictorial device that can arrest and stagger the ordinary eye. For the most part, they refer to the melodrama of the music-halls, and depict the villainous villain, the heroic hero, and sometimes, as a contrast to both, a parson in full robes, with a broad, impassive face. The local drama for ever clings to tragedy, and it is left for the purveyors of soap or milk or chocolate to exploit the art of comedy. On the one hand, there is a tendency, as the public eye grows glutted with horror and sensation, to grow more and more melodramatic; while, on the other, the higher class of advertisement is every year becoming more genuinely artistic and educative. But in any case the poster is only an ephemeral joy to the man in the street. A rainy afternoon and a windy night leave them all in a sorry state, and forces the sensitive man to conclude that they are inevitably a disfigurement to the public street, and that a judicious attempt to suppress the necessary ones by taxation and licence would be of advantage both to the revenue and the happiness of the State.

The eye of the loafer in the street does not travel far before it is dazzled by a public-house. This and the school are the most frequent landmarks in the landscape, and their prominence suggests a strange contrast of dour solidity and garish fascination. In the evening the lights of the public-house are the brightest in the street, and even in the day there is no brass so polished and no windows so well rubbed as those of even the smallest beer-house. On a Saturday night in the summer there are flowers on the counter; in the winter, holly or paper decorations hang from the ceiling of the bar. There are many of these bright oases, so few counter-suggestions; and in idle moments men are very moth-like.

The shops are for the most part of unprosperous and desultory appearance. The small ones, which sell sweets, cigarettes, mineral waters, and the cheaper papers, are all very much alike. Outside they are fortified by the news-bills of the halfpenny papers, sometimes a day and a half old, and an advertisement of " ice-cream soda "—a mixture of three ingredients which were meant to live alone. The windows are rarely clean, and the goods they expose to view are arrayed as they have been for the last six months. Shops of this kind are constantly changing hands, for as a rule the profits are not sufficient to pay the rent of the room they occupy. The bigger provision shops are less dismal in appearance, and certainly more prosperous, but over them too has crept the blight of disorder and weariness. The goods in the window are specked with dirt, the cards which tell their prices stained and dog-eared.

Hurry and poverty, and the acute geographical separation of rich and poor, have dragged down the ideals of a London street, robbing it of charm and colour and all those odd formations by which Englishmen are wont to remember their native town. All those who have taste and delicacy of perception in these things have long ago fled to the West, or the North, or the South, leaving behind them men whose eyes are dimmed by the struggle of life, and whose fibres are so toughened that they have forgotten to know and love the beautiful, and cannot be asked to recreate it, for they have lost the appetite. In the day when the absentee landlords of the river-side (many of whom live as far away as Eaton Square) come again to visit the streets in which their ancestors were content to dwell, building solid houses beside their offices, they will put all this right. Instructions given to agents will be revised ; houses will be colour-washed, and that frequently ; the ugly will slowly give place to something that has character and shapeliness, and windows will not always be monotonously square. Till then the prospect—morning, afternoon, and evening—is in all seasons weary and worn out, and who shall say that

in a measure this does not pitch the key in which men live?

It is difficult to think of a street and forget its smells. In the winter they are a mere undercurrent to the senses, but July and August and a warm September bring them into prominence. The smells of factories and warehouses may be healthy enough, and easily forgiven by the man who passes the gates with perhaps a slightly quickened step. But the lads inside the factory or hop-yard may well grow tired of the flavour. The food-smells, however, are still more pungent and more pervading. As soon as the policeman on his nightly beat has passed beyond the odour of one sizzling fried-fish shop, he will reach that of another; while the jam-maker betrays his whereabouts to everyone within half a mile. The flavour of strawberry lives in every mouth through all July It comes in through the window in the sultry night, fills the streets, and lurks in the very police-station. But the third smell is the hardiest sinner. The vapour of the slum is so indefinable as to be more of an atmosphere than a smell; it is the constant reminder of poverty and grinding life, of shut windows and small inadequate washing-basins, of last week's rain, of crowded homes and long working hours. Those who have never left their river-side homes do not know of it, but for the man fresh from Christ Church Meadow or the Radley Links it pours out from each open door and hangs about every staircase in the model dwellings. To such a man it is a veritable oppression in the summer, and can only be combated by roses from the country, which some rectory gardens never forget to send.

This cheerful panorama must close with the soft, gentle shower of dirt, which falls, and creeps, and covers, and chokes. No man can cope with it. Here and there a gifted woman keeps pace with the tide, cleaning and cleaning with the same uncomplaining consistency that some men show in drinking beer. Such a home will be fresh and spotless, despite a window opened wide in defiance of

Nature's operations. But most of the neighbours are content with a lower standard, and seek to compensate for a coating of dirt by the short-lived smartness of their ornaments.

The factory chimneys are strictly forbidden to smoke, and nearly all obey with a will. The worst offender is the refuse destructor of the Borough Council, which seems beyond the reach of by-laws.

But dust and dirt accumulate despite restrictions, and with them comes a stickiness that creeps from the fingers up the arm, and puts washing on almost the same plane as smoking, as a soothing practice associated with home and repose. The more fastidious are often declared, when they visit their dirtless friends in the country, to be looking pale and tired. The fault lies with their love of soap. Constant washing in hot water destroys the complexion, and makes the clean look ill, while a less particular native appears to thrive.

The street must be left now, unsightly and despondent, with its smells and dust. Yet on a Saturday night in the summer it will be full of life and change, with a kaleidoscope of light hearts and laughing faces passing up and down.

Let a pause be made to look at the homes where children are born and become old and die. Along the south bank of the Thames philanthropy and business have tried to join hands in the erection of vast piles of block buildings, six stories high, with stone staircases and four tenements to every floor. But it is doubtful whether so far the ends of the business man and the housing reformer can be made to meet—a difficulty not unknown to the tenants of these buildings. The evening visitor will sigh many times before he reaches the fifth flight. He may have fallen over the cube-sugar box on the wheels of a bygone trolley which stands outside No. 131 and serves as a perambulator and a barrow. He will have guessed the menu of some fifteen dinners or teas, and wondered why philanthropists are so opposed to light. He will also wonder how infant legs can scramble up and down to their crowded home a

dozen times a day, and whether infant hearts are not sometimes unduly strained. Having struck his head against the wall on the fifth landing, he will add insult to injury by striking a few matches on the wall to see the number on the door. Reassured, he will knock and wait in the gloom, shrinking into the corner to make way for a family bound for the world below. If he is an old inhabitant, he will know of a way through the door. A hand inserted through a slit would grasp a string attached to the latch on the inner side. A sharp tug, a shove, and the door is open before him. By this simple and trusting device the mother is able to go out shopping, and leave the rooms empty, and the children returning from school or work can unlock the door without a key. It is counted a safe practice, for only the members of the family are supposed to " know the ropes," but the method is so common that any denizen of the buildings could find his way into half the tenements as he passed up or down the stairs. The keys themselves, moreover, provide but a meagre safety, for they are of the simplest pattern, and made so much alike as to be in many cases interchangeable. But there is little or no danger of burglary, for when household goods are made neither of silver nor gold, but of sham mahogany and heavily painted china, there is no need to employ the genius of Chubb or Yale.

Having gained entrance by one means or another, the visitor will be compelled to walk warily in order to avoid a perambulator or bicycle, or even a chest of drawers, and possibly all three. The air will be heavily laden with a suggestion of fish and bedding, and the windows will be found tightly shut and latched. One or two may be open for an inch or two, but blinds and curtains will prevent there being much danger of a draught. The rooms appear to be of a comfortable size, but overladen with furniture, bought largely on the hire system, and not always calculated to outlive the final payment. The springs of the armchair touch the ground ; it rocks uneasily in a diagonal

fashion, for only two out of four castors survive, the others having been put away in a drawer, with a wonderful collection of other oddments, which no one has the heart to throw away. There may be a piano, two notes missing (probably also in the drawer, in the hope that " they may come in useful some day "), half a dozen others quite dumb, and the rest very yellow, but vibrating with life. To atone for these defects, its legs are very knobby, and the candles are green, with pink flowers creeping round them. This also was bought on the hire system, when it was by no means new, but already had a Pythagorean remembrance of many different lives in the West and in the East. For pianos begin in the West of London, and in their declining days sink farther and farther East ; while barrel-organs arise in the East, and travel with the sun to soothe the savage breasts in Kensington.

The rooms abound with photographs and memorials of each Bank Holiday ; the drawers are so full that something will be trapped or pushed back each time they are opened. Letters and concert programmes are rarely destroyed, but linger in unexpected places for years together. Clothes soon overflow the small accommodation that exists for them. Skirts and Sunday hats hang on the back of every door, or droop listlessly from the bedposts. Worse than all, clothes are often laid on the bed under the mattress, to be neatly pressed, for a whole week. On the table are the signs of a meal throughout the day, for the teacups and crumbs of breakfast linger till the midday dinner. There is no sharp distinction between what is and what is not a bedroom. Where homes are small and families are large, there must needs be a bed of some sort in every room. Nearer the suburbs may be found some parlours that have never known bedding, but by the river-side there is not space for such niceties.

Of pictures there are not many, for a photograph of a wedding or of a party on the beach at Southend has more personal interest, and is more naturally bought Such

pictures as do hang on the walls are always old ones in still older frames. It is doubtful whether any new pictures are being bought. Certainly few or none can be seen exposed for sale in the shops. The themes of such works of art are the old simple themes of love and war ; the tone they strike is sentimental and tragic. A boy of comparatively advanced taste found himself once in the rooms of an Oxford undergraduate, and, while studying the walls, was asked which picture he preferred. He fixed without hesitation on some engraving (a possession of the landlady rather than the undergraduate) where a small drummer-boy was dying against fearful odds. There is always this natural bias towards tragedy where culture has not made its way. The general impression conveyed by such a room is one of crush and messiness, caused by a shortage of cupboards and chests of drawers, and that curious aversion of the poorer man or woman, " tenacious of his little wealth," to clear out of his castle every month the things that are no longer needed. Yet on occasions when poverty presses ruthlessly upon a family, when no single member is earning a regular wage, the house will grow sadly empty of these prized possessions. One by one they will travel to the pawnshop in borrowed newspapers, till at last but a single bed and the stove of the gas company remain. Then is the room bitterly tidy, yet barely a home.

The same philanthropists have provided in these compact little tenements no scullery to contain a copper for washing clothes, a coal-hole, or a sink. The four families must use in common the single tap and sink that are to be found at the back of each landing.

Furthermore, their pessimism made them think the idea of a bathroom fantastic and absurd. They would have explained, with a show of foresight, that the poor did not care for washing overmuch, and would be likely to use the bath as a receptacle for anything else rather than water and themselves. Their judgment was for the moment sound. Twenty years ago it is true that a bath in each

tenement would have served variously as a waste-paper basket, a wardrobe, a dustbin, and a sink, or even possibly a bed. In the same way it once happened that for many years the Thames Embankment was not used as a public thoroughfare, its true purpose being so far forgotten that its very loneliness made it a danger rather than a convenience.

This business-like pessimism was so starved of ideal and hope as to be without true foresight. For it is only the man who believes in his fellows that can hope to foretell the tendencies of the future. Ten years or more have passed since these ugly barracks were set up. The children at the elementary schools have begun to go regularly to the municipal baths. They have learnt the comfort of a weekly plunge, and the glow of a clean warm body. Working boys have banded themselves into clubs for cricket and football, boxing and wrestling, and found that all these things lead to bathing, sponging, and towelling. Thus the demand has arisen, and there is no supply. Many a boy would welcome the daily bath, and would not allow any domestic requirements to interfere with his enjoyment. It is too late. The buildings are so planned, the system of pipes so arranged, as to render the insertion of a bath all but impossible, for the alterations can only be made at considerable expense. So another fifty or a hundred years must roll by and the aspirations after health, kindled with much effort and difficulty, must be all but stifled, because our builders were not filled with the optimism that can afford to laugh at mere common sense.

The same ignorance of how their neighbours live led the builders to provide a small coal-box for each tenement, in which only two hundredweight can be held at once. This compels each family in the hard days of winter to indulge yet more freely in their economic vice. They are always tempted to buy in small quantities, and so pay exorbitant prices. In the matter of coal there is, once again, no opportunity for the growth of better principles. They are for ever forced to buy coal by the hundredweight,

and pay fourpence more for every sack. It is true that co-operation is a slow growth, and in its imperfect stages conceals many dangers. But the architect who provided for a common coal-cellar (which might be guarded and administered by the porter of the buildings), or a common bathroom at the foot of each staircase, would have been indeed a practical prophet, opening the door to cleaner and happier common life. The builder of the seaside hotel leaves room for the tide to rise ; the railway engineer makes allowance for the expansion of his metals. In future the builder of men's dwellings will be wise to keep his eyes on the potential habits of his neighbours, and not set an everlasting seal across the doors of human development.

Such buildings, although gigantic in size and by no means rare in number, still only represent a proportion of the housing accommodation. The majority of families will in all probability always occupy the ordinary three-storied house. These vary infinitely in conditions of health and comfort, but very few are cleaner or better built than the block buildings described. They have many failings which make them far less desirable. It is uncommon for one family to use a whole house They may pay rent for the three stories, but one floor at least will be sublet or let out to lodgers. In the streets nearer the river-side, and in the smaller courts off the main streets elsewhere, the buildings are in a state of extreme dilapidation. The doors are no longer secure ; the stair-rail is gone (having often been made to serve as firewood in the winter, when coals are one shilling and sixpence a hundredweight). There are ugly circles in the ceiling where the plaster has fallen and exposed to view the broken rotting laths. The walls of each room are thick with an accumulation of old papers that should long ago have been stripped, if only to destroy the swarms of vermin that thrive between each layer of flowers. The outer walls are stained with perpetual damp ; in the upper rooms there are signs of leakage through the roof ; the floors have rotted into holes, where dirty stagnant

water soon collects. Homes such as these are nearly always overcrowded, but are rarely tenanted for long. There is a difficulty about the rent, or the woman upstairs has a grievance against the second floor, and several private hints to offer with regard to behaviour. A quick move is made to rooms of a similar kind. Insanitation and epidemic dangers are naturally enough part of the heavy rent that everyone must pay who live their years in places such as these. Stale air and damp breed weakness when they do not give rise to fever. The figures of typhus and diphtheria vary with the seasons, and are carefully recorded; but who keeps account of rheumatics, and chronic colds, and recurring sores?

Between these dim haunts and the best type of block buildings there is every grade of house and building. The worst are the crimes of the avaricious against the weak, and even in the best the builder's ignorance has starved the life that he was meant to brighten and sustain.

The builder must needs know something of those for whom he builds; the architect "designs" a house, not for his board of direction, who are not going to live there, but for a number of families who need a home. The diamond merchant does not ask a plumber, but a jeweller, to cast a setting for his stones; the gardener will at any rate be consulted when his conservatories are built. A knowledge of poor men, a sympathy with their struggle and defeat, and a yearning that they may climb to better days—these are the foundations on which houses and block dwellings may best be built.

## CHAPTER II

### FAMILY LIFE

It is customary to point to the ideal of a united and home-loving family as the deepest tradition of English life. The English dinner, with its complete circle—the father at the head, the mother at the foot of the table, and the

youngest saying grace—is a picture frequently compared with the restaurant life of the Continent, or the greater independence of boys and girls in the United States. So strong is the belief in this family life as the key to true English happiness, so intense the desire to retain it throughout the land, that it has become usual to test each social or economic reform that is advanced by calculating its effect upon this national characteristic. It is, therefore, perhaps well, on entering the homes of poorer neighbours, to see how far the old ideal still holds its ground. It is natural that the authority of the father should not be quite so strong as in those other families where he is the only bread-winner, and is the natural support of every other member. In many homes by the river he only contributes one half of the whole weekly income, the other half coming from his boys and girls, and perhaps also from his wife. This fact tends to weaken his traditional position, and to make children of sixteen openly independent. Until the age of fourteen a boy obeys his parents, and responds to such measure of discipline as may be expected ; but at that age he leaves school, and immediately earns enough to pay the rent. He now begins to be a person of more importance, whose wishes may be observed. At whatever hour he may come in from work, he may reasonably demand his tea ; while he was at school he must needs be in at the proper time, and take what he was given or go without altogether. As a wage-earner, hard at work all day, he claims the unquestioned right to stay out till eleven o'clock at night. This abdication of the father in favour of his children is more marked in the poorer quarters. There a boy of eighteen will often be found to be the main, if not the entire, support of a small family. He will, without comment, expect and receive two kippers for his tea, while his unemployed father will make the most of bread-and-butter.

More prosperous homes may be found, where the father has regular and well-paid work, and rules with a firm hand. Until his son is nearly twenty he responds without thought

of revolt to a steady discipline, returning home each night by the appointed hour, and avoiding such habits and practices as his father has declared taboo. Such a boy is fortunate, but his case is far too rare. Parental discipline is, in fact, a sure sign of prosperity and respectability.

The hours of work vary so greatly among the members of one family that the opportunity for common meals is confined as a rule to Sunday. It is impossible to sit down to a unanimous breakfast, for some go to work at 5 a.m., and others may not be due till 9 a.m. Each worker, as a rule, boils up his water on the gas-ring, makes a cup of tea, spreads a slice of bread with jam, eating it as he pulls on his boots, does such washing as is possible under the restrictions of both time and space, and hurries off to work, a few minutes late. One or two may come home to a midday dinner, but as a rule this is the privilege of the school-children, who come back soon after twelve. The workers take a packet of sandwiches to work, and supplement them at a coffee-room near the place of their work. Tea-time, like breakfast, is a running series of untidy meals, each adding to the litter of dirty cups and crumb-covered plates on the table. The school-children return in a bunch, with a good deal of noise, soon after half-past four, but those at work will come in singly at any time between six and nine. Thus through the week the family ring round the table is never formed. Sunday dinner is the only time of reunion, and generally occurs at 2 p.m. The whole family does indeed assemble then and eat together, though in small homes where there are many children the younger ones will be found scattered over the room, eating their share on the bed or by the fire. At tea-time the family is about as certain to be together again, at this time reinforced by uncles or aunts, or old friends, from other parts of London. These hospitable customs of Sunday afternoon explain the crowded state of trams and omnibuses at this hour, for nearly everyone has friends " over the water." Often the party is prolonged into the evening ; in some social

circles music and dancing will carry it on till nearly midnight.

Apart from these Sunday celebrations, the whole family is scarcely ever found together. The possibility of a quiet evening spent in reading and games vanishes for want of chairs and cubic inches. The cramped space at home, the lack of attractions there, the monotony of the day's work, and the great difference in their working hours, all conspire to separate the boys and girls when the few hours of freedom come. Once on pleasure bent, they rarely hold together. Two sisters occasionally keep with one another, finding perhaps a couple of youths who are friends of one another, and the four make a very happy quartette, by no means averse to changing partners after a few weeks. Two brothers, even when of the same age, nearly always separate, each finding a group of his own, each with his favourite street-corner from which he surveys life. It would be possible to attend a music-hall or a benefit concert every night of the year, and only find half a dozen instances of two members of a family being there together, content with each other's company. On Sundays some will attend one church or Sunday-school, some another. Should two or three attend the same service, they will be found in different pews. A boy may often belong to a club for two years, and his mother remain in complete ignorance of his whereabouts, for no questions are asked when he comes home and slinks to bed. A boy is often devoted to the baby of the family, but the affection does not long survive, and the boy at work has little to say to his brothers still at school.

On Saturdays and Bank Holidays there is the same separation. Some will be playing cricket or football, some at the Crystal Palace, or on Blackheath, or at Hampstead, each with the small set of friends which constitutes their world of opinion and taste. The lucky ones may get a week's holiday in the year, but they will devise a way of spending it without consulting the others, and often

scarcely telling them their destination. When away they will send many postcards, but the mother is the only one of those at home who will receive one.

The units are living widely separated lives throughout the year, though they sleep each night in two small rooms. They only come home to eat and sleep, and at these time conversation is not very fruitful. The mother knows the name of her boy's most constant companion, but she does not know where the two wander each evening, and, should she ask, she will obtain the vaguest of replies.

Yet there are occasions when the spark is kindled by some trouble or emergency, and the inherited instincts of many centuries burst into flame. Let one of the elder boys come into conflict with the police, and be summoned to the court. The whole family will rush to his assistance, proclaim his innocence, and breathe every sort of implication against the integrity of the Force. They will lose a day's work in order to throng the court and show a united front against the oppressors of the innocent. A troublesome inspector who is doubtful about the well-being of a child will bring upon himself the vindictive anger of a whole family. The mother, who knows so little of her children, and is ignorant of the facts which have led one of them into trouble, yet leaps like an unreasonable tigress to their defence. And who would have it otherwise?

The nurses at the hospital could speak of the family affection that illness or accident brings to the surface. Sunday afternoon sees a long procession of parents and brothers and sisters, armed with flowers and oranges and nuts, gathering outside each hospital. No engagement is so sacred. It is unthinkable that a visiting day should be allowed to pass without a sight of some face from home. (It is, indeed, far easier in these days to find a Good Samaritan than a Spartan mother. The mingling of the two is the very flower of womanhood.)

Death is the greatest call to unity. For the moment the boy and girl desert their friends at the corner, and hover

round the home where in the front room lies the one they have never really known. At all costs, there must be black clothes; at any risk, work must be abandoned, in order that the family may in a body drive together to the funeral. At such times of death, or illness, or disgrace, the cord is tightened, and ideals are found to be true in these dark days which in brighter ones are almost lost to sight.

It is this undercurrent which makes a boy or girl so curiously unwilling to leave home, and which makes the average parent totally opposed to such a step. It would appear that there is little that the boy need regret to be compelled to leave behind. Brighter prospects in the country or in Canada, or even on the other side of London, are dangled before him; but the family, though openly admitting the advantages of the change, oppose it bitterly in private, and it is not difficult for them to persuade the boy that rough times at home are to be preferred to prosperity among strangers. The more cynical would explain that they fear a lonely and destitute old age, and wish to insure that children may be at hand to support them. But such foresight is alien to the nature of the river-side folk, and the cause must be looked for in that intermittent access of family affection.

It is sometimes feared, when an educational authority attempts to do more than merely fill the child's mind, that it is destroying this family tie, and that a generation may arise who look instinctively to the State for the provision of food and clothes. Then indeed would parental responsibility be at an end, family bonds sundered, and the home but a dormitory of State-fed units. But there is one salient fact which answers these alarming theories. The family life is the natural life for all English-speaking people. The group instinct is so firmly inset in the national character that every healthy and hard-working man falls unconsciously into this way of living. The Poor-Law boy, who has never known a home-life himself, as soon as he has scrambled on to his legs and is in a good

position, becomes the head of a model home-loving family, doing as much for his children as any father, and never reflecting that, because the State fed him, it should feed them also. The object of those who feed and clothe and care for the bruised and hungry children at school is to raise up a sound and industrious generation of parents, that will not fall back upon the State, but will be enabled by health and knowledge to support themselves and their families with old-fashioned independence. It is safe to assume that the home instinct will prevail. All that is wanted is one generation of strong boys and girls. They themselves will then do all that is needed for their own children, and the State can once more confine itself to drains and bridges. The only alternative to systematic socialism is a generation of good parents. The only way to produce good parents is to care for the children of the present, that they may grow to be good mothers and fathers of still better children.

The centre and focus of this home-love is but a drab and often uncomely figure, for the mother of a poor family soon loses the bloom of youth. Hers is a life of struggle, a battling for ever against the lack of time and room and money. Only the widows and a few younger women, or those who have invalid or worthless husbands, go to work each day. The rest find that the daily round of home-life provides work enough for a pair of the most willing hands. The task set before her by the conditions of working life to-day is well-nigh impossible; it is in all probability beyond her powers. She left school at fourteen, having learnt her hygiene and cookery and domestic economy, and was sent straight away to a factory to work ten hours a day for three shillings and sixpence a week. In the few hours of leisure no one could ask or expect the young girl to keep her knowledge of housewifery by using it at home. Her help there in the evening may not have been asked, and, if it had been, the monotony of her day's work would make her feel more anxious for a walk in the

crowded streets with a foolish youth who called her foolish names.

At eighteen or twenty she is married, and now she can have but a dim and confused memory of the puddings and soups she learned to make more than six years ago. The family grows, and daily duties thicken ; she is compelled to do as her mother did before her, and get along as best she can, content if she can only turn the corner of each week with the friendly aid of the pawnbroker. Her housekeeping is shiftless, her cooking primitive and wasteful, her cleaning less exacting as each year passes. Her husband at times is "that cantankerous, you wouldn't believe." Sometimes there are blows, of which she says nothing. Her children throng her when she is muddled with more duties than she can fulfil, and with such poor equipment for her day's work. She tries to be stern, but ends by being hasty ; insists on obedience, but when she should be enforcing her orders she is too busy or too tired. By the time she is thirty-five she is frowsy and shapeless, falling possibly into foolish habits, dropping into the public-house in an afternoon to banish the dreariness of her back kitchen, with its chipped cups and dirty antimacassars. She has begun to act a part to every well-dressed person she meets, and to teach the children a policy of grab and gratitude when in touch with philanthropy. In a word, she has given up hope, and, finding that she could not keep pace with the tide of daily duties, she has grown content to drift. On gala days she dresses in far worse taste than in the days before marriage, cramming on more absurd finery and sailing under more impossible colours, and this only serves to make more obvious the disadvantages of middle age. On ordinary days her dress is messy and unkempt, and everywhere about her are signs of a lost pride and confidence. Her voice has grown more shrill, her patience declines ; she learns to whine and nag. Her arguments are a tissue of exaggeration and untruth ; she accuses wildly and defends herself volubly.

This is one of the bitterest tragedies that falls broken from the wheel of life. She is a failure, her struggle has been without romance, and in her old age she is not always pleasant or beautiful. But throughout she has been a wife and a mother, giving life to many children at the risk of her own ; loving them sincerely, if not wisely ; feeding them, as a rule, before herself in a harsh and unaffectionate way ; scrubbing while they played, washing while they slept, cooking and " setting to rights " while they chattered and ran about the room. At the crises of their lives they remember this, though they never talk about it ; and when her tired body is at last still and peaceful, many find that it was she who drew the strings together and made a home. Without her they fall away as the staves of a barrel when the hoop is removed. She has been the centre because she has been the most permanent and the most important figure in the family life. The central fact of poor life is the earning of money, and some unwritten law forces each boy and girl to bring back their wages to the mother. Her purse or pocket is the common fund, and from this she distributes the family income. They are the earners, but she is the spender. Many children bring her an unbroken wage, and she allows them sixpence back as pocket-money. It is the mother who decides the great issues of economy, giving a boy some contribution to a suit of new clothes, or finding some money for an extra holiday. She pays the rent and faces all visitors at anxious times. No negotiations with the pawnbroker will, as a rule, be conducted by any other member of the family.

For she is the constant factor of the home. Others come and go, but she never disappears to camp or Canada. Any week will find her at home in a long stretch of forty years. More than this, she " is about " from early till late. The others go to work, and return at all hours, but they may safely leave a message with her, for she is sure to be at hand throughout the day. Rarely does she go far

from home. What wonder if so small an orbit should include a public-house ?

Her burdened life is made easier by any service done to the children, and the lightening of her duties does not check her love for them. Rather will the work of the school and care committee tend to make her responsibility more sacred to her. For her task becomes more possible, her capacity for worry is no longer overtaxed. The strain of daily duties is relieved, and she has time to look at her children and love them more thoughtfully. If there is one thing that can never be destroyed by State action, it is the love of even the most careless mother for those she has borne.

There are women who are very different from these sad strugglers, and rise above all the trials and obstacles of poverty and work. In the poorest street they may be found. Each room and each child is bright and tidy, and she herself radiant and uncomplaining, with never a sniff for those who do not manage so well as she. Here will be found a stronger sense of family ties, and more devoted children. But such cases are uncommon, for the press of low wages and high rents is heaviest on the mother, and most of them bend beneath the weight. Yet, even so, they are the hope and the soul of home-life. We learn a new beatitude by the river-side : " Blessed are the mothers, for they shall be much loved."

## CHAPTER III

### CUSTOMS AND HABITS

Food is cheap in price and quality alike. A shilling will buy a Sunday dinner for a family of five. But the vegetables, though large in size, will not be too fresh, and the meat will be black with the finger-marks of those critical ladies who pinch all the joints as they pass along the stalls in the road, and perchance buy one of them. Eggs are

bought in some quantities, and fried, for they are too old to be boiled or poached. The milkman does a good trade in the better streets, for he sells in pennyworths, but in the poorer homes fresh milk is rarely seen. Tins of condensed milk are cheaper, and by reason of their sweetness save the supply of sugar. Methods of distribution seem seriously at fault when this should be so, for the cows are browsing ten miles away, while the condensed milk has far to travel and much to suffer before it reaches here. The children, as a consequence, are fed on tea, with a slight colouring of milk. The tea is cheap when bought by the pound, though inclined to be dusty and unproductive. Unhappily, the practice of buying in small quantities has increased of late years, and the science of housekeeping is utterly forgotten. When tea-time approaches, one of the elder children, still at school, is despatched to the little shop round the corner, and bidden to buy and bring back a pennyworth of tea, a halfpennyworth of sugar, twopence-halfpennyworth of tinned milk, a pennyworth of jam, and a loaf of bread. Butter and rice and soap are bought in similar quantities, at the same ruinous rate. It will be remembered among many families that in nursery days the staple dish for tea or breakfast was bread-and-butter, and that only on special days was bread-and-jam substituted for the plainer fare. But with South London children the opposite is the case. Jam is so much cheaper than butter that the child looks ordinarily for bread and "strawberry flavour." When given the opportunity at a party or a picnic, he will devote his attention to the luxury of bread-and-butter. The jam (twopence-halfpenny a pound) has much sugar in it of the cheaper sort, and much that is warm and greasy to the taste. Meat is reserved, as a rule, for Sunday, but certain kinds of fish are seen daily in nearly every house. Numberless shops abound where skate and cod are fried in oil, and served out steaming over the counter, on scraps of old newspapers, with chip potatoes. A portion of moderate size can be bought for

threehalfpence, and constitutes a usual supper for a working boy. The taste will be found even stronger than the smell, but it is the most popular of all dishes, especially before going to bed. In addition to this fried fish, which is usually eaten in the street, kippers (two for threehalfpence), or bloaters, or finnan-haddock are bought at the stalls in the street and cooked at home. Cheap fish, jam, and tea are thus the principal foods which make up the marrow and muscle of the river-side population. There are many additional dainties, proper to seasons of jollity or unusual prosperity, as shrimps, winkles, and water-cress. These are also the offerings of hospitality on Sunday afternoon.

As with food, so with clothes. Their immediate prices are very low, but they are of such a quality, and the manner of their purchase and use is so uneconomical, that if careful accounts were ever kept, the total amount spent on clothes by a family in the course of two years would be found to be far out of proportion to their whole income. A number of causes contribute to this. In the beginning, there is much personal vanity, which may be curbed forcibly by low wages and high prices, but never dies. This vanity takes the form of a desire to impress and to surprise, and it issues in a passion for new clothes that are very obviously new, and that are also tight, smart, and uncomfortable, extremely unsuited to either action or repose. Side by side with this common instinct lies the equally common dread of appearing to neglect social obligations. A funeral demands black clothes. Borrowed plumes rarely suffice, though it is sometimes permissible for a woman to hire a heavy velvet cape or a large black hat. The clothes themselves are almost invariably bought, and in the case of a large family the expense is very considerable. On Sundays they are enslaved by a similar tradition. It is a day for better clothes, for starched collars and bright boots, whether they be black or yellow. The mother, with a sense of bitter pride, will not allow her family to stray into the main streets should a week of depression

have ended in the pawning of their Sunday clothes. The father himself, deprived of his best shirt and collar, omits to shave, and kicks about his room in socks, having lain in bed till past midday, remembering with a sigh of relief that, at any rate, he cannot be expected to go to church. The boy of sixteen acquiesces in this subservience to opinion, and remains indoors all day, caged for want of a collar.

When sentiments such as these are deeply inbred, it requires but a showy tailor's window, with offers of cheap ready-made suits, to tickle a young man's fancy into wild extravagance. A boy earning twelve or fifteen shillings a week is always saving with an eye on a new suit for Sunday. He buys, not one, but two or more in the course of a year, for their smartness is short-lived. They are too cheap to wear for very long. They are not kept with sufficient care at home ; they are worn at the wrong times. Those tight green trousers, the waistcoat with fancy buttons, the coat which fits like a glove, are not to be wasted on only local eyes. They are taken for a day in the country, and return soaked and shapeless, with seams awry and far more than the fashionable number of creases. They even go to camp, lie scattered in a tent with hay and treacle for companions, and in a week age very quickly. One good suit at nearly double their price, wisely worn and neatly folded, would last a year or more, while for the week-day evening an old coat and grey flannel trousers, with a well-tied scarf, would serve every purpose On these points public opinion requires education, but with boys the process is comparatively easy, for they are of a highly imitative disposition. Boys and girls save consciously for their clothes, but the elder folk rely on some windfall or turn of fortune to repair their stock. There is far too little cleaning and mending and patching, far too great an impatience for a new outfit when the old is torn or stained.

A further cause of extravagance, and, indeed, of ill-health, lies in the strange fact that nearly every child and

the majority of elder people wear far too many clothes. In the Kent hop-fields a boy will be found sitting on the edge of his bin, under a hot September sun, picking for ten hours a day, fortified by an old coat, a thick waistcoat, a knitted jersey, and two old shirts. On Blackheath two shirts are considered the right amount for both cricket and football. The tendency is perhaps most marked among small children at elementary schools. In the year 1909 over 14,000 children were examined, and only twenty-one were found to be insufficiently clothed. It is possible, and indeed justifiable, to guess the converse of these figures. It is almost as easy to find a child with too many clothes as it is rare to chance upon one with too few. The clothes are, indeed, old and dirty and torn, but their primary fault is excess rather than defect. The prevalence of vermin in summer is largely due to the wearing of two unwashed shirts and a perpetual jersey underneath other clothes. In this miserable weight the child runs all day long, grows tired and hot, more than usually susceptible to cold, and a more obvious prey to all the evils of dirt and insanitation. If the couple of cotton shirts could be discouraged, and a simple woollen or flannel one be made at home, the lad would be far happier, and the cost would very possibly be less.

In the background of all calculations stands the usurious pawnbroker, the treacherous friend of every poor family. The annual clothing bill would be far less if it were not for the fatal ease with which the blind, harassed mother can obtain his momentary assistance. A suit of clothes may be bought for a sovereign out of hard-earned savings, and worn with pride throughout a Sunday. But on the Monday the rent-collector will call; all that remains of Saturday's wages is barely sufficient for the week's food, and the only realizable asset which can be dispensed with for six days is the new Sunday suit. On Monday morning a group of women, with bundles tied in old newspapers, will be seen outside the pawnshop, waiting for the doors

to open at 9 a.m. ; for this is a common weekly practice, and not the urgent measure of exceptional distress. It is true that on next Saturday night the suit will in all probability be redeemed, but every journey to the pawnshop will add a little to its price. The pawnbroker is a scrupulously honest merchant, a money-lender who is always sure of his security, but his business is a blight upon the life of the district, and his system tempts almost beyond endurance the shiftless and improvident tendencies of his regular customers.

The wastage of money may be great in food and clothes, but pleasures are wonderfully cheap. There are so many things that provide pleasure which cost nothing. There is a great genius for watching among all Londoners. They are happy to look on at any scene that accidentally or by design may stimulate emotion. A funeral may be seen any day at no cost, and appeals to all. This and a fire-engine, an arrest in the street, an epileptic in a fit, the short quick appearance of friends at the police-court, are scenes in melodrama not a bit less moving than the sensations pumped up for sixpence at a theatre. A walk along the crowded street at night is an easy and inexpensive outing of which they never tire. Every cornet player and barrel-organ has a small group ; the open-air meetings are mildly enjoyable. In the street there is always something to be seen, and something may happen at any moment.

These small excitements suffice to make many happy, and yearnings for blue seas and green fields are rare or unknown. For these things in themselves are unsatisfying, and when a visit to the country does occur, a sudden rush will be made for the nearest shop or street, and if there are none there may be considerable discontent. The pleasures of a holiday consist very largely in the power and opportunity to purchase a number of cheap souvenirs, which give a wonderful degree of pleasure in proportion to their cost. No little lad is ever allowed to set out for a school-treat without a penny or two, for without the joy

of spending money there is no holiday. A boy may plead that he has not the money with which to pay for a week's camp. On inquiry it may be found that he has enough money to pay for his railway ticket and camp fees, but there is not enough pocket-money to make a real holiday possible, and without that surplus, camp is not worth anything.

The pennies spent on picture postcards buy much delight for those who scrawl upon them simple pleasantries that have some reference to the comic picture on the back. They are treasured and prized by those who receive them, shown to everyone who desires to see them, and to many who do not. The receipt of a letter is a very lasting pleasure. It is opened with great care after minute inspection, read very slowly, read again many times in the next six months, kept very often for an even longer period, and shown to a very wide circle of friends. The pleasure of mere gossip at the street-door or at the corner cannot easily be exaggerated. A group of boys leaning against the wall, or over the counter of some ice-cream shop, will discuss league football or county cricket from nine o'clock to midnight, while their mothers will find the same time pass very quickly as they rehearse the details of a suicide or sudden death, standing with their babies at the entrance of the court.

Many and strange are the relaxations of workers, but the greater number of them cost little or nothing. Others there are, without doubt, as smoking, drinking, gambling, and betting, which make sad inroads into the weekly incomes and small capitals. But, save, indeed, for the unpardonable luxury of smoking, these are habits indulged in only by the minority, and the larger part of the English people enjoy life itself, demanding wonderfully little more.

There are, however, luxurious habits which are growing up, and though involving in themselves only the expenditure of halfpennies, yet in the aggregate they imply a larger income than is usually the case. These habits are for the most part thoughtless concessions to comfort, smoothing the hard road of poverty. But for the poor man there

can be few soft places if he is to keep pace with the exigencies of food and rent. It is more and more the custom of the working boy or man to spend a penny on being shaved, to spend a halfpenny on a tram when he has time and energy to walk, another halfpenny on an evening paper, another penny for having his boots blacked. All these little conveniences of civilization are pardonable as occasional extravagances, but as regular expenses they belong to a more prosperous type of life, where the struggle for daily bread is less acute.

There still remain the ordinary pleasures of social contact with friends and neighbours. These cannot be so easily assessed. The attitude of the family to the other families in the same street, or in the same buildings, is always a little puzzling. The mother is often at pains to assure her visitor that they always " keep themselves to themselves, and don't associate, as you might say, with none of them." When reproached in the name of Christian charity, she would explain that she didn't know how it was, but she hadn't been brought up to have anything to do with people of that sort. " The language they use is that bad you wouldn't believe." The discrepancy is so great, indeed, that she even finds it necessary to prevent her children from having anything to do with the others in the street. A second visit will find the children playing stump cricket, in such harmony as the uncertain rules of the game will allow, apparently unconscious of the social barriers between them. The mother herself will be found deep in conversation with three despised neighbours, all united by expressions of mutual admiration and endearment against some interfering official. Penetration beyond her front-door would disclose the presence in her kitchen of sundry articles which she has freely borrowed from some neighbour. Why, then, this professed isolation ? It is, perhaps, the only form left to each family of asserting a certain inherent pride, for it is by contrast that men most easily come to respect themselves. By mutual contrast the

families are each led to think themselves a superior unit set in strangely inferior company. But this is only the theory on which they rely to prove their own importance, and it rarely colours their daily conduct or their natural kindness. The boys find their friends wherever they please, and the girls do not regulate their likes or dislikes by the social antipathies of their mothers. The men and the women find their own confidantes and companions with a similar freedom from snobbery or bias. As a family they do not make friends with another family, but hold apart. As individuals they follow the dictates of their own tastes. By this curious distinction friendship and intimacy is made possible without prejudicing the claim of each family to live on its own tin pedestal. The alleviation of many financial difficulties might be secured if co-operative enterprise was more successful. For individual charity and kindness there is a spontaneous readiness among poor neighbours that is well known to all the world, but co-operation is not a natural growth. It will need years of careful fostering, much active sympathy, and many gentle leaders, living by the side of these families who are so jealous of predominance.

When speaking of many thousands, generalizations are a little weak, but it is still possible to point to one or two tendencies that may be traced in every home in the riverside. The first is the blindness to the future. All resources of body, and mind, and pocket, are concentrated on the breasting of to-day's small waves; the breakers of next week are unheeded. It is on this temporizing habit that the harpies who lend money are able to rely. There is one such in nearly every street, a woman of middle age, who starts with a small capital of a few pounds, and ends with several hundreds. She lends shillings to wives who are pressed for rent, to girls who want new dresses, to boys who have gambled and lost. Her rate of interest, well known in the street and imposed without protest, is a penny in the shilling per week. It is only people who

shut their eyes to the future who could ever borrow money so generally as the poor are in the habit of doing at 500 per cent. It is because of the same concentration on the present that boys are driven to accept work that pays best, and offers the least prospect of advancement or even bare continuance. It is for this reason that men and women lightly give up their work on some frivolous pretext. If the faculty of foresight were more commonly in use, the housekeeping of each family would be revolutionized, the daily customs and habits of each person almost entirely different.

Finally, there is a well-nigh universal tendency to cling to the visible and concrete, and ignore all else. If a man is a soldier, let him wear uniform and medals; if he is a rich gentleman, let him wear good clothes, and speak slowly, and quietly, and with authority; if he is religious, a cross should hang from his watch-chain, or a button be stuck in his coat. A laurel-wreath or a letter of commendation is nothing to a silver cup and a gilt-lettered prize. There must be "something to show" for every effort. The rich man who lives simply, the athlete who runs and plays for honour, is much needed to startle the river-side, and to suggest some of those strange abstractions on which the public schools of England have laid the foundations of their greatness. Goodness that is not translated into tangible symbols and rewards is an alien plant which must be brought in and allowed to grow quietly and naturally without show of virtue, and if little is said about it the lesson will be learnt.

## CHAPTER IV

### BIRTH AND INFANCY

Into this crowded river-side world several thousand babies are born each year. With many life is a lost hope from the first, the mere flicker of a damp match in the wind. Others struggle on for six months or a year, but only three-

quarters of those born will live to see school-days, to play games, or to look for work. In the darkest courts the number of children born is far greater than elsewhere, but the proportion of these that survive the unequal struggle is far less. The story is a sad one, to which the ears of propriety are sternly deaf, but it must be briefly told. The south-eastern river-side is so much more guilty of infant loss than any other part of London, the signs and symptoms which explain the grim figures of its shame are so patent to the eye of every observer, that no record of its life could be complete without some mention of these early deaths.

The young mother has many to advise her as the time of her confinement approaches, but little or nothing is effected by way of preparation or precaution. As a rule she is but an ignorant girl of eighteen or nineteen, still working for a long, ill-paid day at a factory, lifting weights, standing for many hours at a time, or bending over her task in some cramped position. As the time for her first confinement draws near, she grows easily tired and fretful, and a little frightened, but anxiety about her wages makes it impossible for her to give up work and stay quietly at home. No law forbids her to go to work, and she may struggle on at her place till the very last day. (The more thoughtful employers, who still remember that they are *in loco parentis* to those who work for them, will have given orders to their managers and foremen that such girls are to be released from work and paid their wages for a month before confinement.) No nurse or doctor is at hand to advise, and insist on proper diet and due precautions. The older women in the court ply her with strange specifics, recommending stout or even gin for keeping up her strength and spirits. Of the publicity and vile coarseness that has robbed birth of its sanctity this is no place to speak. In a room, dark and full of stale smell, on a bed that has never been clean, the baby is born. Outside the air is close and heavy; the noise of the trains and the shouting in the streets never pause. A message has been sent to the

nearest hospital, and a student and a nurse arrive. They do all that can be done in such pitiful surroundings to help the mother and the child. If there is danger, a doctor also comes from the hospital at any time of day or night. But the mischief has all too often been done in the weeks before they come, before anyone in authority was told that a little life was on the way. After the birth the girl is once more left to the advice and attentions of her well-meaning friends. Money is a pressing need, and all too soon she goes back to work, leaving the baby in the charge of some neighbour. Perhaps it is ignorance, perhaps ill-health, perhaps just poverty, but the end of this common story is that she cannot sustain the child, and it dies as suddenly as it came, an obscure life, figuring only on statistics, often unnamed.

The early death of children is most common in the poorest parts, where families are usually much larger, and the mother's duties far beyond her powers, and if the small baby had fewer brothers and sisters its chances of life would often be better. The impossible size of poor families is a grave, urgent problem, raising solemn questions which cannot long remain without an answer. The ill-assorted marriage, which accounts so often for these early deaths, is another factor of industrial evils most difficult to regulate. The dull-witted or imbecile, the epileptic and the alcoholic, marry and are given in marriage, while the nation stands by, building institutions and ruling out columns of figures for the sad results. A man of thirty had drunk heavily for years, and was at last struck down by alcoholic paralysis of the brain, and compelled to give up his work. He married a young girl, and became the father of thirteen children. Neither Church nor State had power to forbid this unholy union, and now half a dozen different authorities, penal, medical, and philanthropic, bear the burden of the seven children who survive. It is no interference with human liberty to stay the hand of a man who strikes a living woman or a child, yet as a nation we hesitate to

thwart the man or woman who by their wantonness are killing or maiming the children yet unborn.

Three out of every four children escape the early dangers, and run about the home till they are old enough for school. But the blight which kills half a garden's roses surely spoils the rest. It is impossible that the evils of unhealthy parents, insanitary homes, unfed and unprepared mothers, should kill one-fourth of the children outright and leave the rest untouched. The problems of infantile mortality are also the problems of infantile vitality; the measures which give life to the dying must also give strength to the living.

Whenever, then, as in the case of the river-side, the number of baby deaths is exceptionally high, it is necessary to expect a low standard of health in those that grow up. In one volume of statistics the London County Council records that among the people of the river-side infant mortality is more common than anywhere else in London; in another volume the medical officer reports: "The worst average physique is to be found in the low-lying areas along the Thames."

The infant is not compelled to go to school till he is five years old, but he may be accepted for kindergarten instruction when he is three. In the poorer quarters, where children are more numerous and the accommodation for them at home is limited, they are usually despatched to school at the earliest possible moment. There are actually more children in London elementary schools at this non-compulsory age of three to five than in the succeeding period of five to seven, when every child must and does go to school. Thus the part is greater than the whole. This remarkable position will be understood when it is remembered that death is still very near to the London child even in the days of his middle-aged infancy, and many who survive three years drop out before the fifth birthday comes.

In any case, however, there must be three years of liberty

and growth at home before school life can begin. They have started with a handicap, as has been shown, and little is done to reduce the odds against them in their first few years. Children in large numbers prove a little trying to the unmethodical mother, whose nerves are not fitted by tea and late hours to endure the constant strain of their presence. The rooms are very small, and closely packed with furniture. Crawling infants, grasping at everything with sticky and destructive hands, sucking a china shepherdess as though she were really Neapolitan ice, tumbling up and down the stairs, and crying loudly till smacked into silence, are really found to be rather " in the way." They are delivered into the charge of an elder sister, aged nine or ten, who wheels them in some form of perambulator, while she goes on her mother's errands, looks into shop windows, or plays a game with other nursemaids of the same tender age. Boys over ten or eleven are rarely saddled with a baby, for manliness is an early growth, and boys in the sixth standard cannot be detailed for nurse's work. These little girls devote the majority of the hours out of school to infant brothers and sisters, and are real nurses. They do not grudge the duty as a hardship, and, in fact, it does not tie their movements very much, for they take the baby with them wherever they want to go, often leaving it fifty yards away for a quarter of an hour. They have more delight in the position than their mother would probably be able to find, and, as a rule, are patient, and good-tempered, and unselfish, even when the baby is exceptionally tiresome. The mother is devoted to the child in her own inexpressive way. When she is older, and someone asks how many children she has had, she will reply in a nonchalant way : " I've had eleven, and only lost four." Her manner is matter-of-fact, but each loss was a cruel blow after its kind, and though at the first recital of the names of the eleven she would forget one and have to begin again, yet there is a memory of each one's face, remembered usually as it was in sleep, clear and

distinct, which never leaves a mother. Each baby is baptized at the time of the churching of the mother, but it is seldom that godparents are appointed other than the parents themselves. This ancient provision of the Church for the spiritual and, indeed, the material guardianship of the child, should the parents die or neglect their natural duties, has been almost completely neglected in the very places where it is most needed. Without undue interference, the godparent might by his friendliness with the family satisfy himself that the child was well cared for. He might without danger of offence supplement its clothes, or toys, or little luxuries, by some chance gift which betrayed more than ordinary interest. No doubt he would think himself unfit to instruct the child in morals or religion, but he might in a quiet way suggest that the small boy should be sent to a Sunday-school, and later to a boys' club or brigade. The number of people who know any one small London child is at present very small. His Christian name is known to his own family, though they are equally likely in the hurry of the moment to use another. Outside this circle he is often an unnamed unit in a sticky and turbulent crowd.

It is necessary to admit that small children are "dragged up" by their mothers. There is little cruelty, perhaps too much kindness, the chief defect in the method usually employed being a rapid and unreasonable alternation between scolding and caressing. Unless on some pretext one of the eleven children can be kept at home, the mother has during all the school hours to take sole charge of the babies. She is busy cleaning, or washing, or cooking, taking advantage of an empty room. The children are sufficiently fidgety to interrupt her work and make her worried. It is a tiring duty, the teaching of obedience to children, the enforcing of orders and rules, and the untrained mother, already behindhand with her house-work, finds the additional task beyond her powers. All the evils of weak discipline creep in; there are terrible threats for small

offences. Then, after the offence has been repeated, the threats, instead of being fulfilled, are merely repeated in more terrible form, and then at the wrong time and in the wrong way comes punishment. A lack of truthfulness vitiates the child's first impressions; the mother is not truthful with the child; she is soon noticed by a sharp urchin to be lying to his father. The small boy learns neither the habits of decency nor the language of innocence. His ears are fouled with strange recurrent words before he is six years old. When he was taken in days gone by to the public-house, in the arms of his mother, or toddling after, with one hand on her flimsy skirt, he was being introduced at an early age to a life that is without the restraints of decency. Custom breeds instinct as well as habit; the imitative child with his sponge-like senses absorbs the life and ways around him without question or understanding. The law which forbids a child to enter a licensed house has not proved to be merely a penal enactment, a harsh compulsion on parents to protect their young children from a primitive knowledge of life's seaminess. It has registered the voice of the best public opinion in any community, reminded the parent of her duties, and stimulated her to a more careful observance of them. So far from restricting the initiative of the parent, it will extend the view of her obligations towards the child. At first a little vindictive against the veto imposed on everyday custom, she ultimately will acquiesce in the suggestion that children should be screened and guarded; her point of view will change unconsciously, and she will grow to observe the same principle in other directions.

But the visits to the public-house were not the only danger in these three years of a child's life at home. The child is fed on such food as his elders happen to be enjoying, though, of course, in vastly smaller quantities. Tea is his daily drink, bread-and-jam his ordinary food, a bit of fish or a shrimp his luxury. The difference between a child and an adult is everywhere regarded as one of degree rather

than of kind. He clamours for a taste of his elder brother's ice-cream, a mouthful of his sister's pastry, a sip of his father's beer or his mother's gin. Then he is very sick in a quiet corner of the staircase, and cries loudly to attract attention ; he is smacked, and cries with even better reason. For a time there is peace, but this is almost a daily programme. His clothes are a mere bundle of soiled cotton, for want of buttons and tapes wound tightly round him, and tied in a hurry with pieces of string. If it passes the wit of ordinary man to dress or undress an ordinary child, it would also puzzle most women to detach this bundle from the child within. In many homes the children are encased thus from day to day, the hands and face alone escaping the tangle, and coming within reach of soap and water. This accumulation of cheap cotton is hot and unhealthy, and cannot be expected to remain clean or tidy.

The child in his first three years lives through long laborious days, scrambling up and down the stairs all morning and afternoon, or playing rather aimlessly with the refuse in the gutter, while at night he accompanies his mother on a round of dissipation or social duties. At midnight women are seen with babies in their arms, still gossiping or quarrelling, unwilling to admit that day is really at an end. The child is asleep, but at a jest or sudden change of arm it will awake and cry.

Nature cannot be blamed if the health of such children is never perfect, and, as a rule, quite precarious. They never learn to blow their nose, and grow content to breathe through the mouth, and sniffle all their school-days. They become so subject to sore places and abscesses as to seem rarely free from a rag or bandage on some limb or another. Countless physical deformities exist among them, which grow daily worse under such conditions ; any tendency to tubercular weakness gains a great start through lack of fresh milk, and air, and sleep. Eyes, mouth, and ears are often sore and inflamed through want of cleanliness and care. The out-patient departments of the hospitals are

thronged with the smaller children; the resources of medicine, treatment, and operation are for ever at their service, but the primary conditions of health at home have been forgotten. When the sick child should be quiet in bed, he is allowed to disobey and run about; a weak heart develops, the child suffers from St. Vitus' dance, grows nervous and anæmic, and is never again robust.

Nearly all these troubles of early childhood arise from carelessness and ignorance, rather than actual neglect. A woman of another world, with the exotic appearance of a suburb or the West, who calls once a week, gives advice, and drops a leaflet on "Pure Milk," will effect nothing more than a possible bitterness and estrangement; but some quiet, patient woman who lived near by, and was a neighbour in knowledge and sympathy, might by the mere dropping of a hint, or the doing of an unasked kindness, win her way slowly, till the lessons of a clean and tidy childhood have been so well learnt that they are not a task, but a natural inclination.

Among all his hardships and troubles the child retains the imperturbable happiness of his kind. His birthday may pass forgotten, but every Bank Holiday will bring a toy. Even when there are no toys, the London child has not far to look before he espies a likely plaything. A couple of milk-tins and a piece of string, or a fish-bone and a nail will suffice. All the impossible combinations left by the street-cleaner are at his service. Though he might know the more constant happiness of secure health, yet, on the whole, these three years of infancy have many golden moments, and when the time comes for school-days to begin, the child has learnt the optimism of the true Londoner, and easily forgets all that is not happy and delightful.

## CHAPTER V

### EDUCATION AT AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

THE child's third birthday comes, and his mother gladly hands him over to the care of the educational authorities for eleven happy years. The boy does not time his arrival at school or his departure to coincide with the beginning or the end of term. He enters very soon after he is three, and leaves on the Friday afternoon before he is fourteen, in a hurry to start at school, in an equal hurry to begin work. This system results in a constant coming and going throughout the term.

The boy may change his school several times to keep pace with his parents' change of address, and he may be absent for months together through accident or epidemic, but the great majority will be wonderfully regular in their attendance for eleven full years. Here lies the hope of the nation; this is the greatest lever of social reform. The homes may have failed to play their part in the formation of men, the streets may teem with every temptation to indolence and vice, the future may have its own industrial dead-locks and moral pitfalls for each lad, yet there is a golden chance for every true school in these eleven years to compensate for the handicaps of the present and prepare him for the future struggle. Charity and philanthropy and religious agencies may effect much, but they only deal with groups and sections. *Every* child must go to school. The whole nation is in the melting-pot. In the hands of those that stir and mould lies the responsibility of producing a new generation of hard workers and good parents. The parish priest or missioner sighs for a chance of influencing every life in his district, and if he were given each one for eleven years, how near he would hope to bring

heaven upon earth! To the Education Committee alone is this trust given.

"Education is the preparation for a complete life." This definition by Herbert Spencer might well be written by way of ironic reminder on the note-paper of every Education Authority. Yet it would be indeed a puzzle to look forward and divine the full meaning of the complete life that might lie before the infant of three, toddling for the first time to school, hand in hand with an elder sister. For the first few years he must be in the infant school, learning his letters, drawing apples in white chalk on brown paper, gurgling over pictures, toying with highly coloured representations of dull geography under the surveillance of women teachers. When past these elementary stages, what is the educational ideal set before the average boy, whose school-days are to end when he is fourteen? What type is it that the authorities seek to produce?

A glance at the syllabus would reassure the ordinary cynic who still labours under the quaint delusion that French, and algebra, and violin-playing are taught in every London Elementary School at the expense of the rate-payer. Such a critic inveighs bitterly against a deterioration in manners, which he usually attributes to laxity in the way of punishment, and he is prepared to damn the whole of the present system as a gigantic waste of money, producing independence and ignorance, and little else. He is rarely anxious to suggest a constructive scheme by way of alternative, and his destructive criticism of the present system is, as a rule, very wide of the actual facts. For the syllabus was designed to leave a boy at fourteen with a thoroughly sound and practical knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic, and with such grounding in English, geography, and history as may enable him to read a newspaper or give a vote with some idea of what he is doing, or may suffice to be the foundation for further studies pursued elsewhere. There are additional subjects

to which a modicum of time is given, as drawing, and singing, and recitation, and drill—all indispensable adjuncts to a child's education, for they teach him to control the eye, the breath, the voice, and the body. Last of all in our category, but first in the day's work, comes Scripture, whose place in the time-table constitutes a separate problem.

But these are all subsidiary to the teaching of the three R's, which between them occupy more than half the twenty-four teaching hours of the week. Such briefly is the educational programme of London, and along these lines must travel close upon a million children for ten months in every twelve. It is at first a little difficult to see how any other ideal is practical so long as the regular compulsory education of a boy must end almost inevitably at fourteen. It is not easy to equip him more than partially for a struggle that must begin so early. Yet it is certain that the present object in view is dispiriting to master and boy alike, for a knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic is no education and no training, but merely the elementary condition of further knowledge, to be satisfied at the age of ten or twelve.

But in many schools the boy is labouring on with these mere rudiments for two or more years after all reasonable requirements have been satisfied. The intelligent visitor, looking at the notebooks of an average class, will be amazed at the high standard of neatness and accuracy, but he will find the excellence of a very visible order. The handwriting is admirable ; sixteen boys out of thirty can write compositions without a flaw in grammar or spelling. Yet it will occur to him that the powers of voluntary thought and reason, of spontaneous inquiry and imagination, have not been stirred. This very perfection of form makes him suspicious as to the fundamental principles of our State curriculum. In public schools boys are not trained to be lawyers, or parsons, or doctors, but to be men. If they

have learnt to work systematically and think independently, they are then fit to be trained for such life and profession as taste or necessity may dictate. But at our elementary schools we seem to aim at producing a nation of clerks; for it is only to a clerk that this perfection of writing and spelling is a necessary training. Our syllabus in practice is not merely a general introduction to life; the skill and enthusiasm of the teacher has made the three R's a science in themselves, and what was meant to be the elements of knowledge has become a specialized technical training for the rather dubious career of the city clerk.

The ideals which inspire and mould our syllabus should go farther than clerkly penmanship, but they must be guided not only by the industrial needs of modern London, but also by the relative capacity of small boys in the poor districts. It is difficult to exaggerate the extent to which mental capacity varies in river-side schools. Brain power is indeed born, not made, and, though it is obviously affected for better or worse, it is far from being dependent on home or family, food or clothes. The clean-collared and well-booted child of church-going parents is often painfully stupid, while the rough lad of the same age will snap at knowledge, and reveal astonishing powers of memory and imitation. Two such boys form a striking contrast. The difference, indeed, between the best and the worst in a class seems to the puzzled teacher to cover the whole gamut between wrangler and imbecile. The best boy will at the end of the term remember not only the substance of every geography and history lesson he has heard (and until he reaches the fifth standard he is not allowed the help of written notes), but the details of numbers, and places, and unimportant persons, that fall so lightly on his teacher's tongue. Often such boys remember in the parrot's fashion, distorting long words into meaningless absurdities, connecting two facts or names quite automatically, without any recollection of the tie that binds them. But, on the

whole, their powers of retaining knowledge, and even reproducing it (a far rarer gift among small boys of nine and ten) reach a very high standard.

Side by side with them sit boys of the same age who remember but the vaguest shadows of what they read or hear. After repeated lessons on the Book of Joshua, they have but a dim memory of carnage. History is read again and again, but they still blindly identify all persons of the name of William in one composite personality who conquers, has red hair, is silent, and has something to do with an orange. Yet they must follow the same syllabus, share the same books, be set the same daily tasks, as the boys at the other end of the class. Their everlasting failure to achieve what is impossible for them brings the state of muddled despair which every teacher dreads. The contrast every hour is so acute that it comes to be accepted as quite natural. Twenty-five words of a certain recognized standard are set for dictation : three boys will always sail through them without a slip, and troop home very proudly ; three others will get every single one absurdly wrong. Five sums are set each Monday, with a similar result. In each subject the same contrast will baffle the teacher and depress or harden the spirit of the boy.

Each class roughly divides itself into two main divisions of " hopefuls " and " very doubtfuls." The former are worth a really good education, and it seems a thousand pities that they should never touch such real education as the classics, or such valuable technical training as is afforded by a three years' course in an engineering shop. Their brains are largely wasted, for all mental training ceases at fourteen, and they pass out to work which makes little demand on their powers. Only two out of every 3,000 boys gain scholarships to secondary schools which may prevent this waste. The " central " or higher-grade schools, to which some boys are promoted, rarely persuade the boys to stay after they are fifteen, but their establishment is a

sign of great hope. On the other hand, the " very doubtfuls," instead of wasting their brains, are wasting their own time and the money of the ratepayer. If they cannot write legibly and read in a rough way when they are twelve, they are not likely to get so much nearer the mark in the next two years at school as to make their stay there of any practical value. If it is admitted that some boys should never be allowed to leave school at fourteen, it is equally certain that there are other boys who need not be allowed to remain there after they are twelve. Classification of boys is becoming a more commonly accepted practice, and has led to the rise of the higher-grade schools, but it might be carried out to a far greater extent. It is possible at the age of eight, nine, or ten for teachers in consultation to decide to which of two classes a boy belongs, and to relegate him accordingly to one of two systems—the one designed to give him a real education or training, the other content to relinquish him to the claims of unskilled labour at the age of twelve, when he will have learnt to read and write and do such arithmetic as may be likely to come in his way. Until some such classification can be effected, the teacher is tempted to thrust upon every boy, whatever his capacity or subsequent career, exactly the same syllabus. For such a very general purpose, the present curriculum would appear to be safe and wise. It is the centre of perennial discussion, and liable to small changes every term. The *vile corpus* of the river-side children is the usual ground for the experiments of the faddy educationalist, but, as a rule, it is only a few half-hours that are spent in such extraneous pursuits as elementary science and nature-study. The actual scope of the syllabus under present conditions is not so open to criticism as the method of the teacher in handling it.

As a body of instructors, trained in the art of teaching, the staff of the elementary schools is a miracle of efficiency. The public school master would pale before their task, and

sink beneath the handicap. The size of the class; the daily choice between noise, if the windows are open, and smell, if they are shut; the physical unfitness of the boys; the lack of co-operation at home, and the consequent absence of foundations on which to build, seem to be hostile conditions so enormous in their aggregate as to preclude any very perceptible progress in the whole class. But the teacher has the great weapon of method, almost unknown to the public schools, who thrive so well without it that 50 per cent. of their boys are able to satisfy the moderate requirements of Responsions in Latin and Greek at the age of eighteen, when they have learnt little else for the previous ten years. The London teacher, in his training-college, has mastered the technique and theory of his work. A hundred methods are at his command to draw out the backward, to untie the knots in the confused mind, to stimulate the lagging interest of the lazy. He can by anecdote or illustration convey any fact of geometry or any precept of morals. By question and answer he is able to lead on the boys till they learn the new truth from their own lips, and so remember it for ever. It is a wonderful —almost a thrilling—sight to see the first-rate teacher carry his boys with him through the conquest of India, over the new-found continent of Australia, or even through the magical possibilities of the metric system. Even the sulky laggard with the black eye and torn trousers on the back bench fixes his gaze on the blackboard, with its chalk-marks of many colours; and the stupid little sniffler in the front, apt sometimes to presume on his deafness, shoots up a hand and says "Calcutta" under his breath almost before the pointer has fastened on the spot. History is a long fairy-tale, geography an inexhaustible cinematograph, arithmetic one great conjuring trick, in the hands of a man who has learnt his art. No trick of the voice nor device of illustration or gesture is forgotten; every resource of shape and colour is employed; and the absorption of the

teacher's own personality in his subject is as complete as though he were an actor enthralling 3,000 willing listeners, instead of three score little boys. Such remarkable powers as these are not by any means exceptional. The really good teacher will be found in almost any school in London, while the average certificated man is an extraordinarily good teacher when compared with his colleague in a public school. The untrained man can only marvel at how much he has left unlearnt.

Yet this very power to teach has brought its own insidious danger. The small boy in the infant school has found the path of learning fairly smooth. Every device of clay, and chalk, and wood, and cardboard has been set at the disposal of his teacher, that the first stages of learning may be traversed with a minimum of effort to his little brain. On reaching the boys' department, he finds a sterner discipline, and more work is expected of him. But the same tendency, though in a less measure, prevails here also. There is too much teaching, and too little work. The teacher, ready to use the powers that his training and experience have given him, works too hard, while the boy's share in the struggle is too light It is possible to make education too easy for children, and to rob learning of the mental discipline, which often wearies, but in the end produces concentration and the capacity to work alone. The bright boy may win his way to the seventh standard without ever finding the work hard or laborious. He is never set with a long list of dates or strange names in front of him, and told that in an hour he must master the contents of two whole pages of dry facts. The long struggles with Latin syntax and Greek accidence are unknown to him, and there is little in the present system of teaching to take their place. He is rarely left to himself with a book in his hands, forced to concentrate all his mind on the dull words before him, with no one at hand to explain or make the memory-work easier by little tricks of repetition and asso-

ciation. The stern discipline of the old classical system effected a more vital control of the will over the brain, and made it possible for the boy, on leaving school, to meet the 10,000 separate facts of anatomy, or the 1,000 cases in his law reports, and assimilate them without despair. The boy who leaves the seventh standard with every promise, and enters the service of a railway company, is first required to sit down by himself and master the symbols of the telegraphic code. This he finds extremely irksome, for the only work he has ever done alone before is the learning of racy poetry, which is the very mildest form of mental discipline.

"Silent reading" is occasionally allowed in odd half-hours, though it finds no recognized place on the time-table. It might well be a regular subject, for reading aloud is but a poor gift compared with the practice of reading in private. School libraries could with advantage be made larger and more varied, and more direct encouragement given to boys to read both in and out of school. There is a very genuine love of tales among all boys. A glance at a school-teacher's diary will illustrate this: "On Friday the sky is dark with the promise of snow, and the playground shining with mud. Long faces in Standard IV. Football quite impossible to-day, though it is our one hour in the week for organized games. Borrow a volume of Grimm's 'Fairy Tales' from the vicarage. After play-time in the afternoon there is a most wonderful silence for three-quarters of an hour, while I read three of the simpler stories. Now and then a laugh. Here and there I make a few 'tags' out of recurring phrases and a sort of chorus is formed, so that on a given signal they all join in, with the proud smile of men who know their part. Field is the most enraptured. He sits forward, head in hands, enthralled by every syllable, impatient of the slightest noise or interruption. For once the wizened face is still, and the fidgety limbs at rest on the seat. At the end of each

story there is a little round of clapping and a buzz of comment. But Field calls for silence, as he sees another story is about to begin. Even Newton, the captain of the standard, feels in a large measure compensated for the loss of football. As for the rest, their attitude may be expressed by saying that it is the only time I have been able to sit down this week."

This natural love of reading books might well lead in the upper standards to a moderate amount of home-work. The boy of ability would relish the opportunity of doing unaided work and trying his powers; the lazy boy would be thrown on his own resources, and compelled to use his mind. Further, it would provide occupation for the many empty and unprofitable hours out of school; it would bring the education of the children more prominently before the parents, and assume their co-operation by forcing them to make some provision for the boy to sit indoors at night.

The working hours each day are absurdly short for a clever boy over twelve. Five hours a day, spent on tasks so easy that he finishes the majority of them without a mistake, does not give him sufficient time in which to do justice to his abilities and make the progress which they demand.

The excess of teaching and lack of private work is to some extent accounted for by the size of the class. The casual visitor to a public school pushes open the door of a class-room, and sees a number of boys silently bending over their work, while the master sits at a desk with a boy beside him. The two are going over the boy's work done out of school hours, noticing his favourite mistakes and special points of weakness. The rest of the class are grinding their heads against some brick wall, learning how hard a thing it is to learn. The master is not "giving a lesson" in Latin; he is said to be "taking his form" in Latin, and he is taking them one by one.

The same visitor will push open the swing-door of an

elementary school class-room, and his eyes will fall on quite a different scene. The teacher will in all probability be standing at the blackboard, the boys ranged in exact rows, each head covering the one in front, hands clasped behind the neck in unanimous response to the command "neck-rest" given at the beginning of the lesson. The class is being taught as one whole, the teacher thinking necessarily of no particular boy. Individual tuition is all but impossible when the average class is but a few short of sixty, and most subjects are studied for but half an hour at a time. Exercises are indeed corrected, but there is little or no chance of pointing out to each boy the nature of his mistakes, and calling his attention to the particular place where confusion or ignorance is blocking his progress. In so large a class the teacher can only with infinite labour remember the characteristics of each boy's work ; the knowledge of individual minds struggling with entirely different difficulties is denied him.

The present size of classes is the great bar to true education. It renders the teacher's task heart-breaking, because impossible ; it deprives the boy of the essence of education, for the hints and suggestions, warnings and protests, spoken to him alone, abide more firmly in his memory than any exhortation given to the whole class. Until a little more money is spent on a larger staff of teachers, the large amount already being spent will not bring its full value. A teacher is not a machine for keeping discipline or delivering lectures to great numbers ; his highest function is to steady an ambitious boy, to quicken another who is lazy, to clear another who is confused, to know and to guide each, not merely to inform all.

This is the vital and urgent reform which will prove the key to almost any other. It is the primary duty of everyone who cares for boys, believes in education, and yearns for a better generation, to press, in and out of season, for smaller classes in every school.

It is not possible to leave the question of syllabus and teaching without some comment on the present position of Scripture. The necessity does not arise from the fact that of late years an unseemly hubbub has raged round the whole question and confused the issues, but from the simple truth that for the small boy instruction in Christianity is vastly more important than anything else. For religion at all ages touches the deep springs of life, whence issue motive, action, temper, and point of view. The Gospel, earnestly taught and rightly understood, does not merely furnish the boy with a moral compass, pointing like some eternal policeman to the good and the safe way. Rather is it true to say that he is possessed and permeated by a greater spirit than his own, so that as he grows older he transcends himself, takes vows which of his own will he could never observe, and cherishes ideals that were never born of self. Much of this must be done in the elementary schools, for only one-fifth of the boys attend Sunday-school. Realizing all this a little dimly (for the multitude, not being a philosopher, is a little muddled as to the process by which its conclusions have been reached), it has been decided that the children in London elementary schools shall receive instruction in the Bible.

Accordingly, Bibles are provided for the use of upper standards, New Testaments for the lower ones—for economy must be effected somewhere, and perhaps the teacher's version of the Old Testament is wiser in the case of small children. After the roll has been called in the morning, Scripture will begin and continue for thirty-five or forty minutes. On two days a week the teacher will tell stories from some appointed book in the Old Testament; on two other days the class will read aloud a Gospel, pauses being made for correction and explanation; and on the fifth morning the boys will be left to commit certain well-known passages to memory.

At the end of nine years the intelligent boy will, under a good teacher, have gained a knowledge of the outlines of Scripture history and the Gospel narrative. How far such knowledge will have been interpreted by the light of the teacher's private belief, so as to give the facts their full value and significance—how far even the Christian code of morals and conduct will have been learnt—are points which will depend entirely on the views and the personality of the teacher. Here lies the key to every difficulty that throngs around this question of religious education. It is the life and creed of the teacher which decides the content and import of the vague terms, "undenominational instruction." It is this very fact which makes every earnest man view the present situation with some concern. It is now the natural duty of every teacher to take his standard in Scripture. It is open to him to claim exemption, but such cases are so rare as to be negligible. In any school where six men are engaged in this work of religious instruction it must happen that they are not all qualified for the task. One or two may, by the secrets of their private life, have rendered themselves unfit to teach the truths of the Bible; one or two are honest sceptics and unbelievers, to whom the Christian moral code is a fine ideal, but a little pedantic in practice, while the facts of the Gospel story are little more than a beautiful myth. All such men are both unfit and, indeed, unwilling to undertake the duty of teaching Scripture. They betray their own scepticism, teach perfunctorily, or even grudge the time, and steal it to make up arrears in other subjects. Boys are notoriously quick to notice change of manner and tone of voice, and they quickly grow to attach the same importance to a subject as their teacher seems to do. Here lies a grave danger, for nothing is more surely destined to eat out the meaning and spirit of Christianity than to commit the teaching of it to unfit and unwilling men. So long as the question is wrapped in such an unfortunate

complexity, the only reform immediately possible would be to restrict the actual teaching of Scripture to the two or three men in each school who volunteered to undertake the duty. Each class might well assemble, as at present, in its own room for the roll-call of names, and then each boy might read in silence the passage for the day. The practice of private reading is of educational value, is welcomed by the boys, and would engender in some a natural habit. After a quarter of an hour, two standards would join together, and one of the masters would in ten minutes explain and ask questions on the passage. Thus only three out of six men would be required to give actual instruction, and he would not find it impossible to teach 120 boys, if the period only lasted for ten minutes.

This possibility is little more than a makeshift, but it would obviate certain dangers of the immediate present without embarrassing a final settlement of the whole question. The things needed to hasten mutual agreement are a recognition that teachers are of more value than schools, and that the capital of a spiritual community lies necessarily in men rather than buildings.

## CHAPTER VI

### SCHOOL INFLUENCES

THE gap left by the deficiencies of home-life is not merely one of education, to be filled by knowledge. In the ten years of his school-days the small London boy looks to his school to give him far more than an adequate knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic. If he is to learn to be a sportsman and play the man, the lesson must be taught at school. If his character is to be formed, and his self-control to be more certain than that of his father, the slow process must be begun at school. The primary object of a school is not to convey knowledge or to teach a trade, but to make boys into men. It is a long and often weary task, requiring patience and much watching, wisdom, and sympathy. It is very difficult at an elementary school, because the boy will look to become a man at the age of fourteen. But this handicap does not relieve the school of its duty ; it only trebles the anxiety. It is made yet more difficult by the absence of co-operation in the home. The secondary school assumes that when away from school the boy is in much the same atmosphere, exposed to the same tone and current of opinion. The elementary school must struggle against the tide, recognizing that with many boys every hour at home is a step back. Here, again, the difficulty can only serve to increase the need for developing this function of the school. The teacher is indeed *in loco parentis ;* the boys must find their school a veritable *alma mater*—*τρεφόμενοι οὐχ ὑπὸ μητρυιᾶς ἀλλ' ὑπὸ μητρός.*

It is round the figure of the teacher that the development of a boy's character must centre, and, oddly enough, this very name of " teacher " points straight to the secret of the trouble. The most casual observer will have asked

why in secondary schools there are *masters*, but in the elementary schools there are *teachers*. The difference in name hides a very real and serious divergence. In the secondary schools, and especially in the case of the residential ones, the men are indeed masters of the boys, controlling, regulating, having them in their power to mould and develop. In the schools of the poor the authorities appoint teachers, selecting them with the same limited notion of their work. There are a few great and wonderful exceptions, all the greater because they struggle with but little encouragement against an almost overwhelming handicap. Save for them, the teachers are only teachers, doing their work in class often with marvellous aptitude and success, yet they are never " masters."

The main practical reason for the inability of the teacher to do much more for the boys than teach them arises from the fact that he lives far away from the school where he teaches. In poor districts it would be difficult to find a twentieth of the total number of teachers living within two miles of the homes of their boys. The effect of this is, of course, disastrous. The boy sees his teacher walking briskly from the tram to the school at a quarter to nine in the morning ; he sees him walk still more quickly back to the tram at a quarter to five. Between these times there are five hours of lessons and two hours in which the teacher is hidden away at rest in the teachers' room. It follows that the boy associates him entirely with the class-room, connects his face with desks and ink-pots, copy-books, blue pencil, and the cane. He knows him just as a teacher, but as a man not at all. The converse is inevitably true. The boy's Christian name and home address may be found easily by reference to the register, but they are not often remembered by the teachers. The only way to remember an address is to use it either

by writing or visiting ; the only way to remember a Christian name is to use it in conversation with parents or friends. All this is necessarily outside the experience of men whose home is in a very different part of London. They have no real knowledge of the boy's life. They do not see him at home, or in the street at night, when his nature is free and he is ready to share himself with anybody. The cream of the work is missed by the teacher from the suburbs ; he knows only the grinding necessities of teaching and class-discipline. Unknown and unknowing, he and the boy live their own separate lives, with few points of vital contact. At fourteen the boy slips away out of the life and ken of the teacher. He would not so have escaped a master. Probably away at work from eight in the morning till six or seven at night, he has the very smallest chance of seeing again his old teacher, who is only in the district from 8.45 a.m. till 4.45 p.m. on five days a week. When a lad is compelled to leave school and start working-life at so early and undeveloped an age, he stands in far greater need of someone to stand by and watch in the rough places of temptation, drift, despair.

So many children find little help at home. The parent's natural function is to advise, guide, and warn, but boys are often deprived of this first chance. The teacher at school is God's second chance for every boy who does not find moral strength and right impulses at home. Should he live within twenty yards of his school, he will be in the very centre of all his old boys, for schools spring so thickly in the populous river-side that the 1,000 children at each one all live in the streets immediately surrounding it. In those half-dozen streets the old teacher will be almost as great a force as the old village schoolmaster, who has trained every boy and man in the place to habits of work

and honesty, and has created the tone and common sense of the whole neighbourhood. Boys at any stage of difficulty, or in any moment of success, will come and tell him what is before them, never ceasing to regard him as an old master. As things are now, even the boy who is attracted by ties of affection or admiration to his old teacher, and would like to report progress two years later, does not know where to look for him, and the stifling of natural desires for praise and judgment leads in the end to a forgetful independence.

Thus it comes about, partly by circumstance, partly by his own fault, that the man is not happy in his work at school. Yet the faces of the women teachers reflect no discontent, no weariness of spirit or monotony of work. They seem born to their task, and cling to their work, even when marriage claims their leisure hours. Each snuffling infant has a particular claim on their care and protection. The mothering instinct endows their teaching with personal force. Discipline reaches its truest standard in the girls' school. The relation of teacher and child is happy and natural, because the teacher is absorbed in the human interest of her work. With infinite patience, labour, and enthusiasm, she leads her fifty girls along, rewarded by their devotion and her own infectious happiness. Teaching is so much more natural to the woman's nature that it is perhaps to be expected that she would more readily transcend the hardships of the river-side school, and be radiant with success, while the man is sick at heart with the weariness of his spiritless toil.

Yet there are other forces at work in a school beside the personality and influence of his teacher which tell upon an English boy. The discipline which reduces fifty volatile little London boys to those rows of studious figures in the crowded silent class-room must surely be effecting a great

deal. Probably there is nothing more remarkable than the subsidence of the utterly undisciplined and impudent street boy into habits of obedience and respect when within the walls of his school. Far too often silence and order are procured by a consistent use of the cane. Where this is so, discipline is a very superficial advantage, missing its true purpose ; producing external order, but not teaching automatic self-control. It is universally recognized by the best teachers that a man should be able to keep his class quiet without ever resorting to the cane, which should be reserved for serious offences. The daily use of force destroys in the mind of the boy and teacher alike the whole idea and value of corporal punishment, robbing it of the dignity and disgrace which always attaches to an occasional weapon. With this exception, the discipline of an elementary school, from a military point of view, is, with a few exceptions, very high indeed. But the military conception of discipline is the power of one man to enforce instant and unconditional obedience from many others. The average secondary school is held together by the converse aspect of discipline—the power of the many over the one. The common notions among such boys as to what is " all right " (at a later age, " good form ") and what is " rotten " (or " bad form ") are far more potent and constant arbiters of action and conduct than the voice of a master. This discipline of custom and tradition forbid and compel many more things than the rules of the school or the authority of the house-master. It enters into every moment of the boy's life, shapes his manners and character without force or struggle. Honour and loyalty are rarely enjoined, but grow naturally from the sheer infection of the school.

It is here that the elementary school is so weak. There is no tradition or cohesion to foster the growth of such

discipline. Nothing outrages the common sense of what is right or wrong ; there is no conventional code to restrain a boy's folly or wildness. The tale-telling habit is painfully common in nearly every school, and sometimes openly encouraged and relied upon by the teacher as a means of detecting the actual offender. There is no natural revolt on the part of the boys against " sneaking." They have no word for it, and that shows that they do not either approve or condemn the practice. It is seldom suggested or assumed by the teacher that they should punish one another. An appeal to the sense of shame at any breach of honour or fair play will meet at first with wonderfully little response, for the accepted conventions of other schools have never reached as far as the river-side.

These school treasures of common tone and mutual discipline lie locked up in public schools, held from the boys who need them most by the present caste system of education in England. The vice of in-breeding reaches its most dangerous limits in the staffing of English schools. The public schools produce their generation of men, each fed on the spirit of these schools, make their selection, and suck back a few to help them produce another generation of like-minded men.

The elementary schools, with the same blindness, produce a million boys of another spirit, train a few of these to be teachers, and draw them back when they have gained all their knowledge of school life from these same elementary schools. The double evil is crudely expressed by saying that all public school masters were once public school boys, and that all elementary teachers were once boys at elementary schools. There is, fortunately, a growing opinion in favour of " cross fertilization," a system by which English schools might share their different excellences, so that masters may be also good teachers, and that teachers may

be also masters. For the rigid exclusion of the present caste system is destructive to either type of school. Many of the public schools need the old board school boy as much as the elementary schools need a leavening of public school boys on their staff. When the second half of this process is accomplished, the small river-side boys will be subjected slowly to the unconscious discipline which should be the chief instrument of every educational establishment.

Correlative to this strong discipline of the many upon the one is the pride of school. This is a factor in a boy's life most strangely forgotten by the educational authorities. The visitor to the river-side is bewildered to find that a small boy does not think his school much better than another, and that the boy now at work scarcely resents his old school being described as a "rough old place." The capacity for place-worship and affection is strong in all boys. If these sentiments are not kindled and used for the development of his character and the shaping of his life, the authorities are setting aside some of the natural instincts most obviously designed to help all education. The affection for school or college centres round its name, its peculiar characteristics, its special tone or message. Such possible causes seem to be almost purposely missing from the elementary school. The schools, for the most part, were given the same name as the street, and even the Cockney imagination cannot vest such places as "Green Street," "Wood Street," "Camden Park Road," with the magic of affectionate association. Improvement in these directions is now noticeable, and it is to be hoped that the tendency to give distinctive names to new schools in London will spread throughout the country. There is a similar unimaginative sameness about the buildings. All elementary schools are so wonderfully and fearfully alike

as to add force to the dangerous impression in the mind of the boy that there is not much difference between one and another. A few oddities and peculiarities would have spoilt the uniformity of design, and made it a little more difficult for the new inspector to be quite so certain of finding blindfold the teachers' room in every school. The value of a school is marked, further, by the imposition and growth of a personality as definite as that of a man, and infinitely more permanent. The accessories and marks of such a thing are a good name for the school—a coat of arms, a motto, a song, a school cap and cricket colours, and everything else that may suggest an individual difference from other schools. Further means of stimulating the school spirit may be found in more constant meetings of the whole school, a more elaborate prize-giving, an annual festival to celebrate the anniversary of its foundation. At present these measures for making the school a world in itself, and more than a mere unit in a great uniform system, are but seldom called into use. As an illustration of what does happen, a school-teacher's diary may again be quoted :

"The prize-giving comes, but after little expectation. A formal notice was received from headquarters three weeks ago to this effect : 'Your prize-giving has been fixed for November 30. Mr. M., your London County Council member, has arranged to give away the prizes.' It sounded rather chilly and mechanical, and the proceedings have done nothing to vary the impression. The prize-giving has been timed for 11 a.m., so that after play-time the whole of the boys' school is drawn up in ranks in the hall, where they must stand and watch proceedings. Mr. M. is detained by the antics of the girls and infants below, so we wait for half an hour. For five minutes there is silence, then a shuffling of feet and a murmur ; then we are bidden

to practise Christmas carols in order to occupy the time. This we do in rather a desultory and irrelevant way At last there is a stir near the door, and all necks are craned in that direction. I look anxiously for a little procession of school managers, and friends, and parents, a chance inspector, and a few old boys. Surely there will be a shout or a cheer, a school song, a waving flag, perhaps a bouquet for the ladies, or musical honours, or fireworks. No such luxury finds place in the official programme. A tired-looking man enters, followed by a good wife and a lady of phlegmatic appearance, who, we are given to understand, represents the six school managers. There is no applause ; the procession is too meagre and commonplace to elicit any spontaneous outburst, and we have been waiting impatiently for half an hour. It is now 11.30, and the ceedings must be hurried through before midday, for we have a return match then against M. Street School, which is of far greater importance than this chill ceremony. Mr. M. begins his duties without delay. A very large number of boys seem to have won prizes. Quite six boys from each standard file before him in a long unbroken line. To each a book, or paint-box, or medal is given, with a quick handshake and a monotonous formula : ' I congratulate you, Albert ' ; ' Thomas, I congratulate you.' The prizes are at last all gone ; feet stir once more uneasily on the floor. A small good boy with a Band of Hope face mounts a chair and recites in tones of shrill emotion ; the upper standards sing some jolly song that is all too short. This comprises the entertainment. Then the compliments. Mr. M. makes some rather involved observations on the relative merits of industry and cleverness, and, on the motion of the headmaster, three cheers are given for him and the ladies, in return for their excessive and altogether remarkable kindness in coming at all. Mr. M.

retaliates by asking the boys to give three cheers for their teachers. The response is distinctly ordinary, for we have been standing upright for an hour, and downstairs our enemies from M. Street are already sliding about in the playground. With an air of melancholy satisfaction, the cavalcade re-forms, and our visitors pass out through the door—Mr. M., his good wife, and the lady of phlegmatic appearance. Verily the sins of omission at such a time are very great !"

There is, however, a bright side among these many deficiencies of school life. In the organization of games as a definite and regular part of school-work lies the hope of the future. There are already one or two schools in each district where teachers spend time and money unsparingly in teaching the boys to play a skilled and sporting game at football and cricket. They organize local leagues for school teams, spend half their dinner-hour in coaching and refereeing, give up Saturday mornings, meet many a levy for proper equipment, and provide out of their modest salaries talent-money for the most successful. The work of such men deserves the highest recognition and encouragement, for the results of their efforts are even greater than they themselves are able to realize. In such schools 200 boys will stay in the dinner-hour to watch a school football match in the playground and cheer their side, and a like number swarm to see the cricket in the nearest park. In addition to these school matches, many schools have adopted a system of " organized games," in which each of the classes is allowed an hour a week out of school-time, in which they are *taught* how to play games. The stern ethics of cricket and the hardness of strict football react upon their character almost more effectually than anything else. They begin to learn to be proud of their school, to hate foul play. The old boys of such a school may always be recog-

nized in later years by infallible signs : they play a better game than other boys ; they obey the referee, and are defeated without dispute ; and, lastly, they are proud of their old school, thinking it different from every other. In the school itself there is a marked change when organized games are the order of the day. Discipline is far more easily maintained ; the cane is used one-tenth the number of times. Something much nearer government by consent seems to obtain where a master is foremost in the teaching of games ; and when such men do punish, they do so with infinitely more effect. Many a boy who has spirit and temper, but little ability, and who passes to a life of hard, unskilled labour, could say with justice that the organized games he had played at school had done more for him than all the weary hours in the class-room, on which millions of pounds are spent each year.

Along this line lies a new world of hope and progress. The few teachers who are leading the way by their own energy and self-sacrifice might well be reinforced, while other schools who have not entered into games with the same zest must be quickened into a new effort. Playground accommodation sadly needs revision and extension, albeit at great expense. At present there is not room for a quarter of the boys to play anything properly, and messy, disorderly games are likely to do as much harm as the real sport will do good. The parks and open spaces must be used still more generally if a high standard of play is to be reached. The equipment provided by the Council might well be more carefully organized, and issued on a more generous scale. It is more than foolish to neglect such opportunities of real education as these school games offer ; it is more than ungrateful to refuse assistance when teachers here and there are labouring so ungrudgingly to secure the real education of boys into men.

Perhaps the most beneficial of school influences lies in the direction of health. A growing apprehension as to the average physique of London school-children, strengthened by such statistics as are obtainable from the system of medical inspection recently introduced, has led to the furtherance of many schemes, promoted once again to repair or mitigate the deficiencies of the home. The present endeavour is to do more than make the children healthy; it seeks to make them value health and understand the conditions which promote it, in order that they, in their turn, shall prove more careful parents. The weakening of parental responsibility for the moment by the active teaching and enforcing of cleanliness may quite naturally lead to the increase of responsibility of parents in the next generation. For clean children should become clean parents, and it is notorious that when parents themselves are clean, they do not allow the children to be any less particular.

It is true that the school buildings are not yet altogether beyond reproach. The staircase is often badly ventilated, and preserves its smell of wet and old clothes through all the holidays—a welcome to the teacher returning from the sea. The class-room has large windows, but the noise of the passing carts and trains is often so great *when they are open* as to make even the stuffiness of infant life to be preferred. With these minor exceptions, the rooms are all that can be desired. The care with which the rooms are decorated by every device known to the teaching profession—the bright fire in winter, the flowers in summer—contribute to make school a very sunny and attractive home. The boy who is ill and tired would often prefer to sit at his desk in school by the fire than to mope in a comfortless room at home.

The careful teacher insists on personal tidiness among his

boys: rough heads and dirty faces are sent off to the lavatory to be brushed and washed. On special days an order is given beforehand that boots must be more smartly cleaned. The more serious cases of verminous boys are strictly dealt with under the clauses of the Children Act. A trained nurse attends at regular intervals and inspects every child. If anyone is found dirty, the parents are twice warned of his condition. If no notice is taken of the warning, after a reasonable interval, the child is taken to a cleansing station and thoroughly washed. Should this happen often, the parents may be prosecuted for neglect. As a rule, the warning proves sufficient to produce the desired effect, the parent being stimulated to a sense of his duties without any further action by the State.

The most pleasant picture of the health programme may be seen any morning in the streets, when a whole class is being led by the teacher to the swimming-baths for half an hour's swimming lesson. It is a wildly happy procession. They form up in two lines against the wall outside the town-hall. Already boots and stockings, collar or scarf, have been taken off, and every button that is not fundamental has been undone. When the tail of the procession has passed through the door, a dozen yelling boys are already in the water, for every moment is precious. The teachers, unfortunately, do not join their boys in the bath, but shout directions from the bank to the minority who are learning to swim. Many of the boys seem content to splash about, but by the time they reach the seventh standard very few will be found who are quite unable to swim. At the clapping of hands they are back in the dressing-boxes, four in each, and fully twenty minutes elapse in arranging tattered coats and trousers. Boots whose soles are tied together with a piece of string, which must also serve as a short lace, and stockings which have

two or three possible entrances, require very careful handling.

A system of regular inspection of every child by a qualified doctor has already begun, but so far no adequate arrangement has been provided for the treatment of all cases. Boys whose eyesight was declared injurious to work and health alike eighteen months ago are still reading and writing, with the tip of their nose next to the work. The inspection has revealed a fearful prevalence of small deformities and physical drawbacks, which have long hindered the progress and marred the happiness of the child's school life. When accommodation is provided for dealing with those troubles, school will indeed remove the handicap that is laid on these small children, and give them a clear start with a strong, healthy body.

Drill has for long found a place in the syllabus, but up to the present it has not been practised with sufficient diligence to effect any great improvement in the carriage and walk of the London boy. Lounging habits and stooping shoulders still grow at the age of ten. More time and thought must be given to this weekly drill if the clean, healthy limbs are to be also supple and erect.

## CHAPTER VII

### CHILD-LIFE OUTSIDE SCHOOL

THE school gates are only open for six hours a day and for five days of the week. The normal child is awake and about for fourteen hours a day, and thus has sixty or seventy waking hours in the week in which he must provide his own occupation. The educational authorities suggest little to him ; they provide no home-work, do not very actively encourage private reading, they lock up the playground. It is not surprising that the Cockney youngster of eleven is ready to accede to his mother's suggestion that he may find someone to employ him for these odd hours out of school. The good woman has a natural bias towards adding a shilling a week to the family income, and she quiets any scruples by the moderately true reflection that it is better for him to be getting used to work than to run about the streets in idleness and mischief. If the work itself was not injurious to body or mind, and was limited strictly to an hour or two a day, it would, perhaps, be a wise choice, so long as the school programme is limited to six hours a day. It is better for a boy to wander round the streets for the purpose of delivering newspapers, than to wander round for no purpose at all. Unhappily, the conditions of a schoolboy's work are usually very different. It is more common to find them selling than delivering papers, and this is a disastrous occupation. It involves late hours and exposure to every sort of weather ; it puts a premium on the natural impudence of a London boy, which school is trying to repress ; and because the majority of his customers only want to see the racing news, it introduces him at an early age to the technique of betting and gambling.

Another favourite pastime with schoolboys was to do the work of a lather-boy at a small barber's shop, but this is

now prohibited by the London by-laws under the Employment of Children Act. Others are busy delivering and collecting milk-cans from five in the morning till the very minute when school begins, and generally ask permission to eat their breakfast, which they have brought in their pocket, during the half-hour properly devoted to undenominational instruction. In the afternoon they fall asleep at their desk. Some drag carts and barrows on a weary round, relieving the strain on the arms by a string across the handles, against which they press their chest and so trundle along. Hence come white faces and weak hearts.

The work done is therefore nearly always a hindrance to the education and development of a boy. It may keep him out of boyish mischief, but generally at a heavy cost. The pay is usually absurdly small, save in the case of selling newspapers, where earnings in the flat-racing season may reach to as much as thirteen shillings a week. Half the number of boys in a school will in the course of the year do some sort of work outside school, but the employment is of the most casual order, and often lasts only for a few days. The general effect of the practice is undoubtedly bad, and can form no part in a civilized time-table of a child's life.

The schoolboys who do not work spend the greater part of the day in the streets, living a crowded day, full of incident, taxing every nerve, and producing the restless, fidgety nature of the town. If diaries were kept, a day's entries would contain more than that of any respectable adult in the City.

8 to 9 a.m.: Got up, began to wash, had breakfast, finished washing, looked for stud, found some string in one of mother's drawers. Ran to school.

9 to 12 midday: School. Got the stick once for talking. Lost my cap.

12 to 12.20 p.m.: Care Committee dinner. Told I should not have any if I shouted any more. Got two helpings.

12.20 to 2 p.m.: Played football in the court. They said it wasn't a goal, so I went down the road. Had a ride on the back of a waggon; nearly run over by a tram. Given a penny, and told not to do it again. Bought some ice-cream. Stoggins came along. Had a fight. Found two cigarette pictures in the gutter. Ran to school.

2 to 4.30 p.m.: School. Found a piece of blue chalk on the desk; swopped it for a piece of string and a picture of a ship. Kicked the boy Adams in playtime because his big brother pinched me.

4.30 to 11 p.m.: Went home for tea. Told not to worry, and sent to buy some tea, and sugar, and jam, and bread. Broke the plate. Old lady gave me twopence. Went home, smacked, but dodged two out of three. Had tea and ran out. Met Jackson and Murphy. Climbed into waste ground; threw stones at hoarding. Dropped a penny somewhere; thought Murphy had it; fought Murphy; found it in my shoe. Went to see moving pictures. Lent penny to brother. Saw a drunk man taken to police-station. Got inside boys' club; said I was fourteen; thrown out. Met Stoggins; gave me a halfpenny; had some rock. Played football with bit of wood in street; just missed the window; ran away. Waited outside Nag's Head to see the "beno" come home. Saw Murphy's mother fighting. A man had a fit. Listened to a man playing a cornet.

11.30 p.m.: Went to bed.

It is an easy journalistic trick to be merely funny when writing other people's diaries for them, but the foregoing is the relation of bare fact with no humorous purpose. The daily doings of a small boy out of school form a rapid succession of inconsequent episodes, calculated to produce smart, resourceful, but unreliable men at the age of fourteen. The games they play in the street or court are wildly lawless, begin and end without much thought. Friendships grow old in a day, fights are forgotten in an

hour. Life is a giddy kaleidoscope of danger, catastrophe, and unexpected windfalls. On Saturdays some will walk to the nearest park and attempt games of a more serious nature ; a few will wander far into the suburbs or the West End. As a rule, however, they find their myriad occupations within a mile of home.

A youth of ten, on being required to write a composition on " Streets," and advised to begin by explaining their purpose, started out with the naked truth of his own experience : " Streets are made for us to play in."

The relation of home and school constitutes a serious factor in every system of education. It is unfortunate that the only times when parents and teacher meet are, as a rule, occasions of mutual blame and recrimination. Either the boy comes home from school with a red card demanding that he should be cleaner, and the mother is aggrieved at this aspersion on the credit of the family ; or the teacher is considered to have punished too severely, and the indignant parent stamps into the class-room to protest against the cruelty to her small son. On neither occasion does the mother show to great advantage, and the father is always pushed very much into the background when the rights or failings of the children are concerned. Between these occasional outbursts, there is normally a vague feeling of dissatisfaction and latent hostility which destroys any sense of co-operation. The mother and teacher rarely meet to compare notes or express mutual appreciation of their efforts. There should be many pleasant points of contact. The parents might with advantage be invited, as is done in some schools of the district, at the time of the prize-giving, to visit the premises, and see how their children are taught, and inspect some of the work that has been done, both good and bad. Each mother would be led to take more interest in the education of the child if she was informed of his progress by the issue of a simple report at the end of the term. In such documents it is unwise to confuse and bewilder the

good woman with a long list of marks. The careful use of adjectives for progress and position in each subject is more easily understood. The parental interest is stimulated by being told that a boy is backward in arithmetic and spelling, but draws with reality, and shows great taste for history. A teacher who takes the boy's drawing-book to the home, and shows the mother what her grubby ten-year-old can do, will share a common pride, and find that he has won an ally of some importance. Boys who are ill might be more frequently visited; for at no time is the sympathy and allegiance of the mother more surely to be won. Tactics such as these are urgently necessary, if the present antipathy is to disappear and a new point of view established.

Many difficult problems, at present almost without an answer, will solve themselves when the mother ceases to be always on the defensive, and is encouraged to take a pride both in her boy and his school. At present the difficulty of school dinners centres round the position of the mother. Her apathy towards the education of her child, her severance from any sense of partnership with the school, make her sometimes ready to snatch advantages but slow to bear her proper share. Her lack of responsibility arises not from the fact that so much is done for her, but that so much is done without her. As long as the education of the boy is taken completely out of her hands, so long will she be apt to stand aloof, regard every committee as a natural enemy, and grasp at all that she can by any manœuvre hope to be given. The absence of home-work, visiting, reports, and all natural ties between school and home are the real enemies of parental responsibility. No mother is harmed by kindness done to her child, so long as every such kindness exacts from her a higher standard, and insures her active co-operation with the school.

It is undeniable that many of the children are hungry, and that in such a state the efforts of education may do

more harm than good. Improper or insufficient feeding makes a boy nervous and worried ; every lesson is a task, every little duty a burden. He grows sulky and tearful, and loses the bright optimism which should enable a boy to get over his little troubles. Very few eat much breakfast, for even the youthful appetite is not brisk after a night in a stuffy and overcrowded bedroom. Until the habits and conditions of home-life are greatly changed, children will not ask for much breakfast, because the demand for food will always depend upon the supply of fresh air. By midday the body and mind have been sufficiently exercised to require food of some sort before further effort is wise or healthy. No argument, moral or economic, can ever in this country defeat the claims of a hungry child. His need of food will always be the primary fact, though the means of satisfying it may give rise to a score of different opinions.

School ceases for two months in the year, and the teachers and authorities retreat into oblivion. Yet education must take cognizance of what happens in the gaps. Physical deterioration, the lack of occupation or discipline, will all prove a handicap to the teacher at the beginning of the next term, and make his first fortnight's work an uphill struggle. The holidays at present constitute a distinct set-back to the processes at work in term-time. Let the teacher again speak for himself : " Two weeks of freedom in the streets and very lax control at home have played havoc with habits of attention and discipline. The holidays have done little good to body or mind. Handwriting has fallen off, and will take a fortnight to recover itself, for no one has held a pen in the last two weeks. Reading is the old series of stumbles, for eyes are unused to print. The mistakes of six months ago rise again ; the Old and the New Testament are once more confused ; ' 'is ' and ' his ' used interchangeably ; the borders of the United Kingdom have faded away completely. This is the common price paid for all holidays, but the boy's holidays seem

to be hardly worth it. They are all glad that school has begun again, their mothers delighted to have once more six hours' peace a day. On the second day they set down on paper all that they have done in the holidays. The redoubtable Hodges (just ten years old) has all the airs of a distracted family man. 'I had to take my baby out all the holidays. My aunt died, and my mother made a pudding.' Silver, the diminutive paper-seller, says: 'I was at work all the holidays, except three days, but I bursted a boy's football.' The fat, sleek Naylor, with long, damp hair and greasy velveteens, admits that 'he sleeps in all the holidays'; while the restless Padder is proud of having been up all one night; and others claim to have been out till 4 a.m. or 5 a.m. There are accounts of how they tried to find a place to play football, but failed, and so just ran about."

The mother finds holiday-time a great strain on her temper and patience. There is nothing for the children to do inside the house or outside it. Sometimes a girl may be employed to help clean and cook, and a boy may be sent on errands, but for a large part of the day they must be left to their own resources. It is in the holidays that street accidents happen, for boys and girls alike run at random along every street, without a glance on either side, hopping on to the back of carts and waggons, jumping off at the first sight of danger in front, without a thought of the perils behind. A few have uncles or cousins in the country, to whom they may be sent for a week in the summer, but the great majority rely for their knowledge of the country on the day-trips that are becoming such a common event. Nothing needs more thought and careful organization than the taking of small children into the country. At present there is more money wasted in this direction than in any other ordinary form of charity.

The number of school-treats increases every year. Benevolent newspaper proprietors send the whole of an

elementary school for a day to Epping; a virtuous child will obtain two or three more treats through church or chapel; while other organizations hover round the poorer quarters, collecting parties of ragged children, whose only qualification is poverty. Many such boys will have the opportunity of a day in the country two or three times in the course of one summer. Such days are of surprisingly little value to the child. They add nothing to his health. A long walk to and from the station, an early start and late return, a long hot day in tight Sunday clothes, over-eating and much running about, will make the child infinitely tired before he reaches home, and upset him for two or three days to come.

Such visits, moreover, teach him very little about the real country. He goes with a thousand others, and they are careful to carry all the essentials of town-life with them. They always frequent some curious spot in the country which is a perfect oasis of urban vulgarity, and prefer to live in the madding crowd rather than shun it altogether. Here will be found automatic machines of every design, shooting-galleries, sweet-stalls, and, possibly, the ice-cream man, with as vile a compound as his comrade by the river-side. All the pleasures and occupations are Cockney ones. The very food has a familiar taste, for pork-pies, potted shrimps, and cheap jam are not true country fare, but the unhappy elaborations of the town. The day is too short and too crowded to give the fresh air a chance, and the child leaves the fields behind, tired rather than refreshed, with a vague impression that in the country you have to walk a long way, and toffee is more expensive. The excitement of the station, the train, the signals, the big dinner, the prizes, have made him happy. But these things are not part of the country life his friends wished to show him. Yet every summer a considerable amount of money is spent to secure for each child two or more of these profitless expeditions. Someone pays three return fares into the country each summer for each small boy. The

same amount of money would provide each child with a full week at some cottage in the country. This is the ideal way for a child to spend his holiday. Under the ægis of such a society as the Children's Country Holiday Fund (18, Buckingham Street, Strand, W.C.), the boy is drafted off to live for a fortnight in some cottage, sharing the simple food, the games, and habits of country boys, and learning there, perhaps, the happiness of real family life. There is only one railway journey, and nothing so tiring and exciting as to counteract the healthy influence of an uninterrupted fortnight among the fields. The boy learns a few of the mysteries of Nature. He stands speechless at first before the milked cow or the shearing of sheep, but soon recovers his Cockney assurance sufficiently to ask questions and make suggestions. In three days he will have entered more into the real spirit of the country, and seen the normal course of life there, than in thirty trips and treats. The work of the Children's Country Holiday Fund does more for London children than all the day-trip funds together, for a fortnight is far more than fourteen days. He sees family life as it should be, and it will encourage him in later years to take his own family away together for a holiday.

The child can never quite make up his mind about the country, but he is never in doubt about his anxiety to go there. They will advance a dozen different reasons, most of them inspired by rather priggish reading-books. Their memories of the country grow dim in the winter, and lead to a most chaotic state of mind. Recourse may again be had to the school diary : " Tom Shaw writes of the country thus : ' It is so beautiful to hear the birds singing some of their best songs,' with half a suggestion that the Epping thrush keeps the pick of his repertoire for the one day when Tom is there to hear. ' There is not so many policemen in the country ; that is why I would rather live there '; thus Master Peter, who has already been two or three times in a police-court, before reaching the dangerous age

of ten. The true subjective touch is furnished by a boy who writes, ' The only people in the country are the people who come for the summer holidays,' forgetting that some poor fellows have to live there all the year round. The observant and imaginative Brown, after enumerating at great length all the more common agricultural pursuits, concludes thus : ' Then others make iron ladders for the railway signals.' Brown's mind was busy when he looked out of the railway carriage window. The greater variety of animals in the country puzzles the boy's mind not a little. Lockett insists that horses in the country are principally used for hunting rabbits, while Billett grows confused about food, saying that ' veals ' are good to eat, but pigs are only fit for cows."

Education cannot be confined to schools and teachers. The home, the holidays, the country, must be all included in the great scheme of making men. There is a natural yearning for play and adventure, which holiday-classes and scout patrols will utilize. There is in the roughest boy a strange passion for flowers and cornfields, for ugly animals like toads and fish, that cannot be neglected, and can only be satisfied by visits to the real country.

And behind all these most valuable expedients for pursuing education beyond the school lies the ultimate need of the present situation—the closer co-operation of the parent and the teacher.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE BOY AT WORK

THE boy at fourteen leaves school for ever. As a rule, he will never again visit the premises, and possibly ten years may elapse before he will see his teacher. If he has reached the seventh standard, he will be a useful and intelligent lad, with a good handwriting and good general knowledge, not servile, but ready to obey. He has probably been a monitor of some sort, and learnt to exercise a little authority, if not to be a task-master to himself. The seventh standard are as good-looking and promising a set of boys as may be found anywhere in the country. Never in his life does a river-side boy touch so high a level as in his last six months at school. What a strange transformation in twenty years to the coarse, colourless face of the working man, with his clumsy habits and slow, limited intelligence. The contrast is on every tram. It is difficult to find a good-looking man of forty among the crowd on top, coming home from work, but among the boys who leap on and off at the back of the tram there is rarely one that has not a bright face of much promise. These changes of bright eyes to dull, of pink face to grey, of jump and skip to slouch and lounge, are symptoms of the great tragedy of the city. The boy is ground on the wheel of life by the stern process of hard work and economic struggle, and what emerges is a calamitous distortion of the seventh-standard monitor.

The boy leaving school is faced with a choice. Neither he nor his parents appreciate its importance. His father should know well the comparative chances of a skilled and an unskilled career; but long years of hard work and mechanical poverty have destroyed foresight and imagination, and he finds it difficult to take his stand by the side

of his fourteen-year-old boy, and see by the light of his own experience another life stretched out before him. The rocks which he has struck, the gulf of unemployment which he has failed to bridge, lie all before his son ; but though men see behind them their crises and misfortunes, they do not always read them as mistaken choices, the results of short-sighted cupidity. So the father and mother who have suffered cannot always save their children from the same mistakes and the same suffering.

The choice before the boy of fourteen is between two or three different kinds of work. As a rule, the work which is easiest to obtain offers the highest wages, but the worst prospects. To this class belong all such occupations definitely recognized as boy's work, in which it would be considered absurd to employ anyone except a boy. Thus a lad will be employed as " beer-boy " in the wharf or dock, acting as general messenger to a group of men, who pay him seven or eight shillings a week to fetch their tea, drinks, and tobacco, all through the day. As a van-boy to a railway company or a firm of carriers, he will earn the same amount ; as a newsboy he will make even more money. Such a choice is tempting to boy and parent alike. The boy hands to his mother all but sixpence of his wages, and a sudden addition of seven shillings to the family income each week is a recompense for many unseen evils in the future. The work itself is full of incident and adventure, more attractive to a fidgety boy of fourteen than the office or warehouse, and is easily to be found, because small boys leaving school are preferred to older ones. " Who chooses here will find what many boys desire "—money, freedom, excitement. But in three years' time comes unemployment and poverty. He now wants a man's wage, and is only fit for a boy's job.

The second kind of work consists of those places which a boy may be asked to fill in factory or warehouse, and in its prospect varies infinitely. The boy is needed very often

to do little more than run errands, sweep and tidy, carry and fetch for other men. In food factories boys are engaged and dismissed at random, and the work has little more promise than that of the first class. In other factories and warehouses the boy, by steady work and by showing such aptitude as even unskilled labour demands, may keep his place and grow old in the service of the same firm. The pay is as good as a van-boy's or a beer-boy's, but the work far more monotonous. "Who chooses me shall have what he deserves." The steady boy may work without interruption for a growing wage to the end of his days; the erratic and light-headed youth will find himself on the surplus list, liable to be "put off" work for months at a time.

There remains a third choice, only within the grasp of a few boys. An unusually neat and quick boy may be picked out by his headmaster and recommended to some city office. He may apply to the railway company to enter their regular employment, and satisfy himself with two shillings and sixpence a week for a couple of years. Engineering works are few and far between in the riverside district, but should a boy obtain entrance here, or become in any way a learner at a trade, he will only receive a nominal wage, insufficient to pay for his tram-fares and daily dinner. Such opportunities do not demand merely a pecuniary sacrifice on the part of the parent. If progress is to be made, and the stiff ladder climbed, the boy must give up his spare hours to evening classes and private study. The office-boy must learn shorthand and book-keeping, the apprentice must know his mechanics and chemistry, or the brightest career will prove the very blindest of alleys. When other boys, whom he knows to be less capable, are earning more and working shorter hours, it needs much sacrifice and strength of mind for a boy to keep his eye on these distant heights. "Who chooses me must give and hazard all he hath." The conditions of

success are very stern, and many a brave starter falls out before he has reached halfway.

The choice between these three openings is the turning-point of life (though it is well to remember that for many boys only the first two alternatives are possible). After five years the three roads diverge very quickly, and it grows each year more difficult to believe that these varied types of men once lived in the same street, and sat together at the same inky desks. In thirty years' time, many who chose the first road will have begun the long series of journeys between prison and common lodging-house ; those who followed the second will be working men, with large families, still in the drab streets by the river-side ; while the few who dared the stiffer way will have grown more prosperous, and disappeared to the golden heights of Clapham or Tooting, or even to Hampstead itself.

It is, therefore, of supreme national importance that the right kind of boy should choose the type of life for which by character and ability he is best fitted. Should the incompetent boy essay to be a clerk or engineer, and fail, the nation would lose little. The employer will be irritated, and may found on this one instance a wild and sweeping condemnation of the poor ; the boy will be disappointed, and lose the very self-confidence which was his greatest asset. But the country as a whole is wasting nothing.

The converse is infinitely more serious. For when a boy of more than average ability and sound character, having no opportunity to obtain work which demands self-improvement and contains a corresponding promise of advancement, is driven instead to unskilled and even casual labour, the nation is losing all his gifts and the whole of his developed possibilities. Such a case is far too common. The chances of a career are not too many or too obvious, and no one may be at hand to point them out. The natural desire of the parent that the boy, after being a consumer of food for fourteen years, should now become a contributor,

the anxiety of the boy for a free rough life, and the absence of a friendly organization to advise both impartially, all conspire to drag down the boy to a level of life that is far below his capacities. As a result, a thousand lives are wasted every year, and men toil in the dockyards who, if they had chosen the life of training and development, might now be designing Dreadnoughts from an armchair, or labouring at even higher service for their country. It is idle for any political party to promise economy of State moneys and make no effort after economy of brains.

It is the natural function of a neighbour to advise, though always a delicate task. The means of effecting this economy in the boy-ability of England lies in the direction of advice as much as compulsion. The establishment of a juvenile labour exchange, having an advisory committee at each elementary school, marks the recognition of this fact. The task before such an organization is not merely " to find some job " for the boy. Boys cannot be poured indiscriminately from school into the labour market, as water slips from reservoir to tap. The life of any community is far more of a puzzle. There is ideally one place, and one place only, for each boy, and he can only be fitted into it by a deliberate estimation of his capacity and tastes, and a constant survey of the opportunities afforded by the local industries. Such a task implies the co-operation on each advisory committee of the teacher, who can solve the first half of the equation, and the labour exchange expert, who should be in a position to solve the second half.

The responsibility in each case is very great, for a boy's life hangs in the balance. The duties are not easy, for the right opening must be found, the boy and his parents fully persuaded that along this road lie welfare and happiness; and the only weapons are tact and personality. Here is scope for the friend who comes, perhaps, from outside the district, and sees in clearer perspective the roads of skilled and unskilled labour opening out before each boy. As a school manager or member of a care committee, he has

shared the life of the school, so far as his spare time will allow—played or umpired in the school games, watched the tone and tendencies of the elder boys—and so earned his right to advise and suggest. A thousand men of this type are wanted in London alone.

The choice once made, whether by himself or another, the boy very soon falls into the routine of work, and in the first fortnight ages rapidly. Hitherto the smoking of cigarettes was a furtive prank, only delightful because forbidden ; now it becomes a public exhibition, denoting manhood, independence, and wealth. This is a symptom of an unhappy and premature transition. While still at school, wealth was a matter of an odd penny or two, soon come and gone in a hundred different ways. Now he keeps sixpence or even a shilling out of his weekly wage, and is a regular customer at the nearest ice-cream and sweet-stuff shops. His new position at home as regular wage-earner entitles him to a sudden access of independence, which he finds very agreeable. He now buys his own clothes (to a large extent), spends his holidays according to his own taste, is allowed to remain out at night till ten or eleven o'clock, and begins to pass outside the jurisdiction of parental punishment. These new privileges, coming just as the stern discipline of school is finally relaxed, are likely to strain the character of a boy of fourteen most unduly. For his work has by no means taken the place of school or home. A lively youngster is often regarded as a welcome diversion by the older men in the factory or warehouse. Independence and boyish repartee win an easy laugh, and the boy is encouraged to ape the man till he is in danger of becoming an intolerable nuisance. At such an age he is peculiarly trying to the manager of a boys' club, being at first restive against any discipline of rules or tradition of respect and silence. Yet it is at this very time that club life and discipline are most essential, if the value of school is to be preserved and the excessive freedom of his new life in some way balanced.

The boy does not, as a rule, keep his first place for very long. The reasons for his leaving are put in many different ways, but commonly amount to the simple fact that the work he does is only worth a boy's wage, and that he must leave it as soon as he shows signs of becoming a man. A firm of carriers may employ a thousand drivers, and a like number of van-boys. But the career of a driver is forty years, that of a van-boy only four; so that a driver will outlive ten van-boys in the service of the firm. In other words, of every ten boys who dangle their legs over the tailboard of a van, only one can reasonably hope to stay on and become a driver. Another of the ten may aspire to a permanent position as stable-hand or checker, but there will still be eight boys thrown out of work at the age of seventeen and eighteen. These periods of idleness come to nearly every boy, but vary in length from a week to two years. With some they are recurrent evils, no one year being without a period of unemployment, until gradually the gaps widen, and a man grows up who is more accustomed to being out of work than to any other condition.

It is when the boy is out of work for the first time that he feels it most acutely. It is a terrible thing to be unwelcome. For a few years the lad has worked with a light heart, full of chaff and repartee, has found his position at home easy and comfortable, has made many a congenial friend in the street or club, and enjoyed life in the careless sociable way of a true London boy. Some Saturday comes, and the boy is paid off with the intimation that he need not come again. Often some excuse is offered to the effect that business is slack, or the boy has been late in the morning, or found playing in the yard. But the boy knows well enough that these pretexts are meant to hide the real truth that he is no longer wanted, for another boy of fourteen can step into his place, fresh from school, and do his work equally well for a slightly lower wage.

On Monday morning the search begins. An early start must be made, for some firms begin work at six o'clock, and

perhaps a laggard may not arrive in time, and so forfeit his place. "Down the river-side and over the City" is the laconic description which a boy gives of his early pilgrimage. The large firms hang out a board, "No hands wanted," on the outer gate, and there is no appeal against that. At other places the boy asks his question, and waits till the busy manager or foreman can see him. Sometimes his name and address are taken, and he is told that they will "drop him a postcard." At first the boy is hopeful, and counts this as a chance, but after it has happened twenty times, he comes to regard it as a charitable refusal. After his early round is over, the boy tries his second string, and adjourns to the public reading-room to see the advertisements in the newspapers. Two or three of them seem worth following up, though many miles apart. A further tramp ensues, but at each place there have been twenty or thirty applicants, and the vacancy has been long since filled. There are a number of possible third strings. The labour exchange is just worth trying; a friendly parson or club manager may know of something; while perhaps a brother-in-law in regular work might speak a word for him.

This daily programme is continued for several weeks, with disastrous effect. A hundred refusals, curt, genial, roundabout, have made the boy realize that his labour is not much needed. At home he is becoming more and more unwelcome, for he eats more than he did when still a schoolboy, and contributes even less. The doors of his club may possibly be closed against him, if he cannot pay his subscription and no friend is at hand to lend the penny. It is a grim prospect. Morning, afternoon, and evening—work, home, and even sometimes at his club—he is not wanted. Collars grow dirty and boots begin to crack; the ends of his mouth are turning down; his hair is not so often brushed; the lining of his cap begins to show; pins take the place of buttons; the scarf is less carefully adjusted. The boy is losing his native self-confidence, almost ready to accept the world's opinion that he is not wanted. The change in

appearance reflects only too surely a moral dilapidation within. He ceases to care, to be particular, mixes more readily with the chronic loafer, learns something of his tricks and evasions. At night his old pals gather round him and ask his luck, supply him with cigarettes, and include him in their plans. Were it not for their natural and unaffected constancy, the boy would fall more rapidly. Their generosity to one of their number out of work is often unwise (for, being too long continued, it deprives him of the stimulus to search for work), but it is a silent and unexpected tribute to friendship which betrays the real boy-nature.

Months pass on, and the boy flags in his daily search, beginning to rely on odd jobs and the casual chances which come to every man if he only stands long enough at a busy corner. By now his clothes are so ragged, his boots so unsightly, that he is too disreputable to be offered work at the ordinary firm. The knowledge of this fact is a final blow to his self-confidence. If the boy does not pull himself together and find work, and has no friend at hand to feed him and clothe him, so that he may be fit for it, within twelve months it is more than likely that he will find himself lodged in barracks—or prison. For crime and the recruiting sergeant draw upon much the same class in South London. The lad who is becoming an habitué of the street corner and coffee-stall has these strange alternatives before him. It is from this class that the army recruits a large proportion of its London men ; it is at this stage in a boy's life that the prison first sees his face. The issue is a momentous one. For the army will make a man of him, if he serves for long enough, but prison may dash all his hopes. The period of unemployment is a dark one, and always liable to react unfavourably on the boy's character ; but sometimes it only lasts for a few weeks, and the boy is soon his old self again, work and wages secure for a few years, if not for life.

The work itself is hard and long. Overtime is a constant practice with many firms, who pay but little for the extra

hours, and do not regard them as an optional addition to the full day's work. At the busy times of the year a boy of fifteen or sixteen may be at work from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., earning as much as eight or nine shillings for the week. Occasionally tea is given to those working overtime in lieu of extra payment, and where this is done in a generous spirit, the change may be of advantage to the boy. No one ever knows when he will be required to work overtime, nor for how long, and this fact makes evening engagements very precarious during the busy seasons. The big employers are generally very ready to revise their time-table in the interests of the boys, but the smaller ones keep so close an eye on their small margin of profit as to be often oblivious of the flesh and blood that they employ. It is passing strange that an employer who has caught the spirit of his public school and college should yet be unable to see any special reason why the boys in his office should be allowed a week's holiday in which to go to camp.

On the river-side wharves boys are frequently employed on Saturdays till 4 or 5 p.m., and thus prevented from ever playing football or cricket. In many other quarters the same thoughtlessness will be found. But, as a rule, when the matter is brought before the heads of the bigger firms, they realize the mistake, and are as anxious as anyone to put it right. It will generally be found that in matters of hours and conditions of work a quiet consultation with the principal employers is the surest means of reform. Should this course fail, legislation and compulsory by-laws are inevitable, but they are a poor substitute for that other policy which assumes the employer to be a man and a neighbour. By the paying of wages to each man, woman, or child, the employer incurs a separate and distinct obligation. No subscription to Christmas dinners, or crippled homes, or seaside camps can become his proper contribution to the solution of the social problem. The performance of his social duties lies within his factory gates, inside the office walls. The housewife who governs her

little kingdom on the other side of the kitchen door with wisdom and sympathy, the man of leisure who is satisfied as to the conditions of his golf-caddies, and the page-boys at his club, these have fulfilled their primary social obligation. When they have done this, the work of the cheque-book and the visiting of the sick and poor are supererogatory, welcome signs of a readiness to meet more than their own natural obligations. Subscriptions are the excess of human kindness, and mark the overflowing love; but as a substitute for social order and sympathy within a man's own circle of industry they are the accursed device of most satanic selfishness. No employer can afford to give one guinea to charity till he has so recast the system under which his labourers work for him as to be assured that in serving him they sacrifice unduly neither health nor morals nor religion. It is the assumption of this truth which awakens men to feel the weight of their position and the issues that hang on their life. A surfeit of compulsory legislation ignores the possibility of establishing such an industrial ethic, and banishes for ever the human element of employment.

When the evils of long hours, of overtime, and unemployment have been fully weighed, it still remains to estimate the general effect that six years of uninterrupted work have had upon the boy when he reaches twenty. Physically he is tougher, boasting, perhaps, more sinew than actual muscle. The emaciated loafer does not look an athlete, but he carries a heavy bag for half a mile, and seems to think sixpence easily earned. In some occupations the boys, if allowed to remain long, grow ill and weak. Tea-packing covers them with dust, destroys their appetite for anything save drink and cigarettes, and leads them into tubercular trouble. The sawdust of the timber-mills has often a like effect. In certain processes of leather-dyeing boys are wet through nearly all day long, and grow rheumatic forty years before their time. Van-boys suffer from insufficient sleep and exposure to weather.

The average boy, however, is physically improved by his six years of work. But the charm of life has hardened into rather a weary round. School-days were very varied ; no two were alike. They had so much more incident, more of the unexpected, both in pain and pleasure. After the excitement of the first two weeks, working days are very drab. Little demand is made on intelligence, initiative, or imagination in the wharves, tanneries, or food-stuff factories of South London. Work grows so monotonous that its very monotony no longer occasions comment. The boy never thinks of his work as a feature of his life ; it lies at the back of his mind as an unmentioned necessity, stripped of all interest or romance. He is loath to speak of it, for it is a dull thing, of which nothing can be predicated, and no conversation can live which begins from this starting-point. No group of lads talking at the corner on a summer evening would ever be found to be speaking of work. The mother knows her son works at the warehouse at the other end of the High Street, and that it brings into her pocket twelve shillings a week, but it would not occur to her to ask him his exact function in the production of cheap jam or cake, and he would find no interest in explaining the part he played. He neither enjoys nor actively loathes his work. Now and then something more than usually unpleasant happens, and he puts on his coat with the sudden and unreasonable dignity of the Cockney, draws his wages, and walks away rather loftily into a very uncertain future. Little explanation is made at home—where it is most reasonably expected—but his friends that night learn the facts, embellished by a detailed conversation which has been subsequently set in order to make the action more abundantly justified. Work is lightly thrown up and lightly entered upon. A few boys are proud of their work, confident of the future, in danger of a pharisaical and uncharitable prosperity. The bulk, however, live with a blind eye both to the future and the past.

At fourteen they were full of life, quick to respond to

every change in circumstance and chance. In the next six years the thirst for excitement goes unsatisfied, and long ten-hour days deaden the quick impulses and searchings of a schoolboy. Eyes are not so bright, words come more slowly, the circle of ideas is contracting. Work, and wages, and food—a grim chain of cause and effect, stifling the breath of fresh life and interest, and leaving the world sadly limited in motive and ideal. If nothing else than these arises to catch the boy's mind and fire his will, what can the observer expect but the early stages of a dull material middle age ?

The average boy engaged on unskilled work is wonderfully oblivious to the chances of the future. The days of fairy-tales are over, and castles in the air rarely delight him. There are few Dick Whittingtons. The most prevalent impression seems to be that to-morrow will in all probability be very like to-day, that next year, save for a slight rise in wages, will be but a repetition of the present. There is a dim anxiety for a better job, but it is a rare phase usually connected with some momentary idea of marriage. The desire to be a foreman stirs very few to unusual effort. Ambition is dead in many a boy, killed by the dulness of that work, which demands but mechanical attention, and receives nothing more.

This dulness of industrial work arises, no doubt, from the scientific division of labour, which cheapens production, while increasing efficiency and profit.

A hundred years ago, the boy who worked for a tea-merchant on a small river-side wharf would board the sailing-vessel just home from China, listen to the sailors' yarns of foreign parts, lend a hand as the tea was unloaded and carried to the wharf.

He would assist at the weighing, tasting, unpacking, labelling, and be present also at the sale and despatch of every hundredweight. He would handle spices and tapestry, and learn something of the varied riches of the world, and survey the long chain of human cleverness from the first owner to the final user, for he and half a dozen

others would comprise the whole staff of the East Indian merchant.

But now the boy fills a very different place in the quickened commerce of the world. He never moves all day from his corner in the tea-factory, packing tea with both hands into an endless line of boxes, all exactly the same size and shape ; or else he sticks labels on to these boxes for sixty hours a week, and the action of his hands never varies by an inch from hour to hour. As it is with tea, so also with biscuits, and jam, and leather, and flour. Romance and interest have yielded to speed and profit. There can be only one result from this monotony of daily work. Power to think is deadened, natural buoyancy suppressed. But the drudgery which requires so little effort must bring to every restless spirit a swift reaction when its claim upon him ceases.

The buzzer goes, the factory gates swing open, the timekeeper is busy with his notebook, the crowd of men, women, boys, and girls swarm out into the street. Now there is life again. No mere chatter or conversation, but shouts and cries ; no smiles, but loud, harsh laughter. Cigarettes are lighted, tongues loosed, minds begin to move again. A stray curate in a new hat, a coloured pair of socks, or a bright motor—nothing can escape the quick eye of the boy and girl released from work. No people are so much alive, when the day's work is over, as these vivacious folk by the river-side. Their rough spirits, so free and inconsiderate, make them uncomfortable and disagreeable fellow-passengers to the more sedate citizens in omnibus or tram.

But to their work they turn a dull, nonchalant mind, divorcing it from life as a dead season in which reason, taste, sensation are all asleep. Great is the torpor of unskilled industry, and great and dangerous the reaction in freedom's hours.

## CHAPTER IX

### SPARE TIME OF THE WORKING BOY

It is about seven o'clock in the evening of each weekday that the "Heads," as they are pleased to call themselves, can be seen gathering at the corner of the street. They are a group of working fellows, their average age perhaps seventeen, joined together by different chances. Bill the Silent and Bill the Conqueror are an oddly-matched pair, but they are as indispensable to each other as concave and convex, and it would be strange to find them far apart. To them is added Buster the Wit, because he lived in the same buildings once. He brings with him Bert and Alf as a chorus to his jokes. Percy lends distinction to the group by his bright ties, and no one objects to Fatty hanging on the edge of the crowd as a foil to Percy and a butt for Buster's jokes. So all groups are formed, whether by Galilee or the River Thames, units and couples stretching hands until they form a circle.

It is only at this time of the day that the Heads can hope to meet. Early morning has no spare minutes, and the dinner-hour is not a sociable time, for a boy does not, as a rule, choose his "mates" from among those with whom he works. These evening hours are the whole of their life, the time when they are really awake. The group forms very gradually each night, and those who are working overtime will not stroll up till ten o'clock; for all the Heads go home first when work is over. The programme of spare hours begins almost invariably with tea in the kitchen, a wash (generally described as a "sluice") at the tap in the yard or on the landing, and the putting on of a collar and another coat. The exact order of these preparations varies, but it is quite clear that the washing and dressing is not in honour of the tea, which he probably eats by himself, but a tribute to the publicity of the streets. All this may last an hour, for the Heads are quite timeless

in their pleasures, and the evening is undivided by the exactitudes of the clock. When they meet, they will do nothing very wild or wonderful, but merely enjoy the reaction from a dull day's work. Percy's working clothes are old and worn, bespattered with oil and mud; hence the efflorescence of bright ties and new suits. Buster's foreman is a stern taskmaster, and thus foments a demand for utter liberty of wit and fancy in the evening. A quiet, tame boy may be content to sit at home each night, reading the parish magazine, or listening to the gossip of his mother and a neighbour; but the Heads would think this only another form of confinement, no more tolerable than the ten hours they have already spent inside factory walls. They only ask to be out in the streets, free to turn wherever they like, to mix with others, learn the news, and form a chorus of taste and opinion. The Londoner hates to be alone, is most at home when one of a suffocating crowd. He likes to go to church, if he is sure he will have to scramble for a place. The prospect of an empty pew, with room to stretch his legs, will make him shiver. So the Heads find their happiness in being what they would call a "click," which is a far more genial affair than the old word "clique" would ever suggest.

The rendezvous for some "clicks" is a pillar-box or a railway-arch, or a coffee-stall; but the Heads prefer a sweetstuff and cigarette shop, where they sit on the counter, and someone buys something about every ten minutes. This innocent and rather useless vigil, varied by an occasional stroll, will last for fully three hours. The more obvious pleasures are threefold. In the first place, there is the charm of eating, drinking, and smoking. Fatty, of the bright and bulging cheeks, indulges in these to a remarkable extent between the ordinary meals of the day. Stodgy pastry, lime-juice, and pale acid tablets, chocolate, nuts, and fruit, all serve to supplement the staple fare at home of kipper and fried fish. There is also in these small shops a wealth of variety in mineral waters quite un-

known to Kensington. The teetotaler in the West knows only a barren choice of ginger-beer and lemonade, but here is displayed a host of fizzy coloured drinks, reinforced by a number of hot mixtures made from the essence of raspberry, pineapple, ginger, or peppermint. These odd refreshments are but caviare to the general, but to the Heads each has its peculiar merits, and they choose with the inexorable certainty of the connoisseur. There is far less variety in the matter of smoking. Only Percy and Bill the Conqueror buy the cardboard packets of cigarettes where you get ten for threepence, with a picture of a sailor and a lifebelt on the outside, and the photograph of a dancing lady or famous general slipped in as a gratuitous afterthought. Bert and Alf and the others buy five small cigarettes for one penny in a paper packet (easily squashed, and therefore carried like a fountain-pen in an upper waistcoat pocket). The great joy of a cigarette lies in the lighting of it, and in the first two whiffs. So much is this the case that each one commonly lights his " fag," draws in the smoke twice, inhaling deeply, breathes it out, spits, and says something, and then, holding his cigarette in his right hand, extinguishes it with the thumb and first finger of his left, and replaces it in the bottom right-hand pocket of his waistcoat. Ten minutes later the process will be repeated, and by this means, though the boy will seem always to be smoking, he will only consume a penny packet in a day. Where boys come under the influence of a public-school or college mission, it is noticeable that they begin to smoke pipes instead of cigarettes, for the boy is a highly imitative person. Once the fashion sets strongly in favour of pipes, there will be only an occasional return to cheap cigarettes ; and since smoking is necessary, the greatest reform lies in the substitution of the pipe for these dusty, noxious little whiffs.

The second pleasure to be derived from this haunting of the streets is the joy of wearing something a little brighter than working clothes. The variation may be merely a new

tie of green and red and gold, or a straw hat with a brown ribbon, or a scarf-pin, or a white silk scarf peeping from underneath the waistcoat, like a nineteenth-century "slip." On Saturday evening and all through Sunday the change will probably be very thorough, and may include gloves, stick, bright waistcoat. These varieties add a lustre to ten shillings a week, and make the Sunday promenade an active pleasure and no mere formality. Bill the Conqueror has an athletic reputation, and feels it incumbent upon him to appear in something rather striking at these times, while Percy, with his good looks and wavy hair, never presents the same complete picture on two successive Sundays. Bert and Alf are mere hangers-on, and feebly echo the taste of their leaders. Buster is rather reckless with his money, and can only rise to a butterfly bow, and Fatty does his best by wearing clothes that are far too tight for him.

The third pleasure arises from the sociable instincts of the Heads. In the heart of their families they are strangely non-communicative, and shrink into their shell and live a life apart ; but once outside their homes they are not really happy and confident till they have found their group. A sense of security and importance seems to invest each one when he becomes a member of the "click." It forms a world where Bill the Conqueror may gain his right position as leader, where Percy may share conventions of dress and manner with Bert and Alf, where Buster may enjoy an audience, and where Bill the Silent may absorb knowledge in peace, and feel he is among great men. The conversation, if overheard, would appear but a desultory *réchauffé* of the evening newspaper and an athletic weekly, with such local and personal news as may be of immediate interest. For the greater part of the year football holds the stage. Cricket is never quite such an engrossing topic, though the fortunes of the Surrey county team are followed with that breathless and extravagant interest which demands a copy of every edition of the "Star." A most amazing knowledge is betrayed of the personal appearance, character,

and moral weakness of each individual player. Their native village, the year of their birth, and their manner of livelihood in the off-season are all matters of common knowledge to the cigarette-smoking enthusiasts. None of the Heads are without a cricket or football guide in the inside pocket of their coat, and thither they will refer in argument for the day of Tunnicliffe's birth, or the average weight of Aston Villa's forwards.

This genius for hero-worship is not confined to the cricket or football fields. Boxers or wrestlers, runners and cyclists, weight-putters, and dog-fanciers, who seem obscure people to their employers, and to the small-minded men at Westminster, are in the sweetstuff shop assumed to be national celebrities, their times, weights, and records stored away in minds that seem capable of containing little else. Even Bill and Percy, leaders themselves, are still followers at heart, and talk constantly about famous people, more rarely of themselves. Their tongue likes to dwell familiarly on popular heroes: fame earns a far greater tribute than mere wealth or power. Sport may be momentarily eclipsed by a murder or local scandal, but these are very ephemeral topics, and all their details will be forgotten as soon as they have begun to fade away in the halfpenny Press from headlines into paragraphs.

The conclusions and moral judgments occasionally passed in the course of such conversations are rarely or never original. Certain formulæ, adopted from fathers or the Press, or arising in the Stock Exchange and filtering through the public-houses till they pervade all streets, are counted sufficient to crown and dismiss the subject. The Heads never talk about plays they have seen or books they have read, they never touch on work or religion, and only Buster in his wildest witticism ever invades the field of politics. Their wit is usually borrowed from some catch at the music-hall, which does duty a thousand times, even among those who never saw the sketch in which it comes.

For ordinary purposes of argument the *tu quoque* suffices,

while Buster, with his wrinkling face, can raise a laugh by the mere use of extravagant nicknames. He will shout "Sexton Blake!" after some chance slouch hat in the street, though the face beneath it is far less romantic than that of the sixpenny detective. A man running after a tram must be called Dorando at any cost, while an ugly, clumsy fellow who interrupts can always be silenced by the name of a recent murderer.

It is perhaps hardly to be expected that these groups and couples of gossiping boys should for ever remain content with their own society. There are always within sight similar groups of girls, giggling and sucking sweets, talking over the petty scandals that darken and yet relieve the drudgery of their lives. Sooner or later nearly every one of the Heads feels the desire to walk out with a young lady. Some begin as early as sixteen, and will have quarrelled with half a dozen possible brides before they are twenty-one. Very few will reach the latter age without a flash of romance attaching to them. With Percy "walking out" is merely a matter of companionship, and involves no definite thought of matrimony. There may come a time when the pair make certain promises to each other, but this will not be till a year or two of regular meetings and excursions have passed. The proceeding throughout is so casual and non-committal as to make it a very temporary arrangement, terminable without prejudice by either party at a day's notice. The first meeting will be through a very easy and informal introduction, effected with or without a third person. An arrangement is made to walk together on certain nights, Percy to buy sweets and pay tram-fares, the girl to decide the time, place, and route. (Very often the girl brings a friend or sister, and Percy brings Bert, and a happy quartette is formed.) Some evening the habit will lapse, but no feelings will be hurt; there will be no burst of dramatic indignation, no moping over unrequited love. It would be hard to define the pleasure of walking arm-in-arm on these vague terms of companionship. The

publicity of the arrangement is a mild enjoyment. For at first they elect to walk in the bright and crowded streets, and Percy, being still young enough to desire to be thought older, likes it to be seen that he has reached the susceptible age when a girl looks upon him with design. The talk seems to be very one-sided. The girl always appears to be narrating all the more angry conversations she has had with her foreman or employer during the past week. "'E says to me, 'e says, 'You're a cat.' I don't see as what 'e 'as any cause to say such a thing as that, so I says to 'im, I says, 'Come to that, you're no better yourself'—and I 'ad 'im there, Percy. He didn't say nothing else, and I don't know as what I shall leave on Saturday now that we've come to what you might call an understanding like." Percy replies with a good many unintelligible reminiscences of what he and his friends have been doing lately in the field of sport. "Bill and me was in, and we only wanted ten runs, and Bill he shouted to me to run, and I ran, and the fellow who was umpiring at the other end, as what walks out with my sister, he was cleaning out his pipe, and didn't see, so I just looked at him like, and he said 'No-ball'; and after a bit of talk with the other side, who don't know how to play a sporting game, we went on, and Fatty got five not out." There would perhaps be utter boredom on either part if the situation were not saved by an amorous jest on the part of Percy, an encouraging shriek from the girl, and a good deal of mutual nudging. Percy has pursued these tactics with a string of girls, but Bill the Silent, on the contrary, has never had more than one girl. It is improbable that he will ever have the nerve to give her up; so in the end they will marry and be happy for ever. Percy's fate will come some day. After a year of this rather meaningless "walking out," the relation will ripen into one of open courtship. Percy has had time and opportunity to make up his mind and change it half a dozen times, and at last faces the possibility of marriage with the girl who has walked beside him for so many evenings. At

this point he must put his spare time more unreservedly at her disposal, and few, indeed, are his free evenings. No arrangements can be made for Sunday or a Bank Holiday which do not include her in the programme, and, indeed, incorporate her wishes. Some of his habits, possibly even his religion, may have to be changed in response to her demands. Bill the Silent becomes a still more abject slave, and is expected to come and sit in the kitchen of the girl's mother, to convince her family that he is a " quiet, well-spoken young man." This he does most effectively by sitting on the edge of a chair, turning his bowler hat in both hands, and saying nothing. After the evening stroll, he accompanies the girl home, and stays outside the half-open door saying good-night in a sheepish manner for nearly an hour.

The sociable instinct which caused the Heads to hang on to each other, and later to break off and join a girl in their spare hours, may lead them to more expensive means of dissipation. None of them will go alone to any place of entertainment, unless he is moderately certain of meeting the others there. But on Saturday or Monday nights it may well be that they feel ready for some more certain excitement than the streets are likely to afford. There must be in every life an occasional desire for an hour or two of extra sensations, uncommon to the daily round. The choice of programmes before such a group with only sixpences in their pockets is unhappily small, unless they are willing to leave South London behind, and tramp across the river. If Percy is to take his young lady with him, the two will probably go to some local concert, promoted to support the finances of a cricket or football club, whose members are not sufficiently regular with their subscriptions, or to serve as a " benefit " to some local celebrity, who was never really so famous as at the end of his career. The concert will be very respectable, the programme will be a long one, and there will be a great many stewards with gay rosettes, who pass with an air of mystery backwards and forwards through the curtain at the side of the

platform. A long interval enables conversation to flow more freely, and Percy will walk about and talk to other friends. The songs are old favourites, and have nearly all made their bow in the music-halls, whence they are borrowed with all the gestures and "tags" of the popular artistes who first produced them. The verses of a song are widely separated from each other by a volume of patter, built into a mosaic of riddles, funny stories, and popular allusions. The singer also contrives to put in a modicum of step-dancing, and occasionally asks the audience to join in a repetition of the chorus. In this way a "song" may last for fully twenty minutes. There may or may not be conjuring (the supply of jugglers seems to be running short in these days), but there will certainly be a prolonged exhibition of step-dancing, and a number of recitations from funny gentlemen in pantomime costumes, who call themselves "eccentrics" with a nice modesty. An exhibition bout of boxing or wrestling may figure largely on the bills, but in reality it bears a tame appearance to the uninitiated, for though the boxers are naked to the waist and look very Herculean, no one seems likely to be hurt. The songs and recitations fall very sharply into two classes, farcically comic and morbidly sentimental. Real pathos and real comedy are unknown. There is no music, no light touch, nothing that is either natural or artistic. The music and the words alike seem to be written with a very heavy hand, and perhaps for that reason make the surer appeal to simple hearts. Yet it is a thousand pities that so little effort should be made to provide concerts in which real music and genuine humour should find a place. The task is a delicate one, and for some years results might be disappointing; but ultimately the truth and simplicity of real art must evoke response.

When Percy and Bill are not thus bound by the ties of courtship, the Heads may perhaps frequent in a body one of the numerous music-halls, where the performances are short and crowded; the programme consists of ten or

twelve "turns," or items, each lasting for about ten minutes. Admission costs anything from twopence to two shillings, but on certain nights soldiers and Territorials are admitted free, if they will only come in uniform. There is comparatively little in many of the songs and sketches to which the broad-minded could take exception, though perhaps the whole programme is calculated to lower rather than to raise the ideas of the audience. As in the popular concerts, the whole entertainment is pitched in a very minor key, the songs being false and unreal, the sketches far removed from ordinary life.

The Heads will wait outside for half an hour in order to secure the first row in the gallery, whence they can call to friends in the pit, and will add a swing to the performance by joining in every chorus with most unmusical warmth, and flinging chance comments to each artist as he appears. They probably suffer little harm from any one of the items, or, indeed, from the whole programme. Yet the whole atmosphere of the place is low. It was at the music-halls that Bert first met the elder man in the gay tight checks, who took him to see the Derby "for a treat," and will prove the evil genius of a reckless and dissolute life, unless some stronger force shall depose his influence. It was here also that Alf met the young girl of engaging frankness and dangerously high spirits, who may lead him to the shame that darkens lives not yet begun. Attendance at a music-hall as a weekly practice is commonly held to denote a careless and irreligious life; and though there may be in all districts some good men and steady lads who are not ashamed to frequent these places, it is still a safe rule that the worst boys are the *habitués*, and the best boys do not go at all. At the best it is a poor entertainment, at the worst it is the gate to every temptation, and no man who is trying to help a boy can view with anything but apprehension his return to the gallery door. Once again a lost opportunity for good has become a positive evil. The theatres should lead opinion, foster

righteous indignation, appeal to the highest sense of beauty and truth. The drama by the river-side has forgotten these ideals; it measures the tone of public taste and opinion, and then strikes a full two notes below.

Such and such are the relaxations open to the Heads in their spare time—a strange medley of influences in the moulding of men's character. They would appear to offer but a poor choice, and should they accept them all in turn, they would be braced neither in body nor mind for the struggle of manhood. There are, happily, in many parts other alternatives for spare time offered by philanthropy and the State in their more enlightened moments. The growth of boys' clubs throughout England in the last fifty years has focussed the attention of many a professional or City man upon the problems of boy-life. Scarcely any parish exists now in South London where there is not provision made in some form for the spare time and interests of working boys. The necessity of such clubs is admitted by the most casual, and even those who make no effort to support them are sufficiently tolerant to be loud in their praise. The methods of these clubs will be found in any district to be of an infinite variety. The purely negative purpose which they serve, however, is common to them all. As a shelter from the street, an alternative to music-halls and boxing saloons, as a substitute for a better home and longer school-days, the club in its most primary aspects begins to justify its existence. It is better for the Heads to be inside than outside, because the outside is bad. But nothing that is negative lives, and a club that is merely a shelter can have no permanent effect A shelter is only a temporary expedient, and suggests a storm of rain in Piccadilly, or a tardy tram on the Embankment. It is good that Bert and Alf should be withdrawn for a few evenings in the week from the emptiness and temptations of street life; but they must always be near these dangers, and if by their hours in the clubs they are not better equipped to face them, the club has not done one half of its work

Four walls and a roof do not make a club; it is more than a building, though it may be found in a mere shed behind the vicarage or in a stable underneath the railway arch. The negative soon merges into the positive good, when a notice-board is hoisted, and a name appears. For the elementary advantage of a club lies in the corporate sense which it creates, and leaves to grow into a whole body of tradition and unspoken laws. Whatever the specific purpose, rules, or occupations in a club, the mere belonging to it does good to the indecisive Bert. He has learnt little of the strict home-code, which regulates many a boy's life and instincts elsewhere, felt nothing of tradition or place-worship at his school. The social instinct, already noticeable in the street, is easily kindled into a flame of devotion to "the club." He becomes one of a group, which is a concomitance of spirit and purpose rather than mere chance, and while retaining his cherished independence, wins all the fresh benefits of a community. Apart from strict rules and regulations, which affect conduct rather than character, apart from the advice or appeal of his club manager, he is a better fellow inside the club than he was outside it. His thoughts and language in the streets were agreeably elastic. When at a music-hall or boxing saloon they were readily altered to the spirit of the place, and became a little lower, without his being conscious of the change; just as insensibly inside the club language and thoughts become a little cleaner and higher. He already gambles constantly, and can barely conceive any issue of interest, where money is not at stake; yet he will, as a rule, refrain from his practices while on club premises, not so much because of the strict rules which forbid betting there, but rather because he realizes that it is a wrong and unsuitable place for that stamp of occupation. The same feeling grows up in Alf with regard to indecent or blasphemous words; they are common enough in street and home, and late at night his drunken mother uses them as terms of maudlin endearment, but in the club they are out of place.

Side by side with these restrictions there grows in Fatty a greater carefulness in dress and appearance, a deference to the wishes of others, and something of the unselfishness of a citizen. These vague effects are produced by every club, and in varying measure upon every one of their members, so that even the failures and backsliders who disappear after a few months are a little better for their short experience of corporate life.

These preventive and general advantages are of the essence of every boys' club, but an examination of the further and more substantial benefits reveals a wide divergence in aim, and method, and result. All clubs keep boys from the streets ; all clubs imbue them with a corporate spirit ; and they nearly all go a great deal further, but in very different directions. In one the emphasis may be laid on discipline ; in a second club, rather on friendliness. One club is military, another is educational, a third athletic and gymnastic, a fourth social, with a strong religious basis. There are differences in payment, rules, government, and tone. Therefore, in enumerating the advantages of boys' clubs in general, it is necessary for the critic to go from one club to another ; for in no single club can the strong points of all be found in harmonious combination.

The Heads gain much from the discipline enforced. They have been much in need of it since they left school, and, if it is exercised by a man whom they like and admire, they will acquiesce in it readily enough, and soon forget that they ever found it irksome. This club discipline reminds Bill the Conqueror of many things that he would otherwise ignore. Punctuality, both in payment of subscription and attendance at some necessary meeting, reliability in performing any duties allotted to him, readiness to abide by authority and to bury a grievance for the sake of the club, are habits only learned by the rigid enforcement of club rules. These are virtues often missing in the boy who is successful at games and easily popular with all his kind. He has taken his prominence for granted.

and done little to repay admiration. Once formed, these habits are of the utmost value to the character of such a promising boy. For Bill, who even in the second standard at school was already a leader, is a bit of an egoist, and the function of his club is to prune the more objectionable forms of his conceit without injuring his value as a distinct individual—a task performed with varying success for other boys by the public schools. At a certain age repression is the kindest medicine for all, and those who leave school at fourteen are in danger of losing half the dose. With the North-Country boy this egoism commonly takes the form of having very fixed opinions on serious matters at an early age. Buster, on the contrary, usually exploits himself from an intense desire to be funny, to have the last word, to attract attention. He is at times painfully apt in his interruptions, but his irrepressibility becomes a social nuisance if not sternly checked. The discipline enforced by the club manager, and accepted by the members, will teach even Buster the possibilities of silence. Such discipline will, of course, never be allowed to separate the Heads from their club manager by setting up authority as a barrier rather than a link. The personal contact of Mr. X. with Bill the Silent and Bill the Conqueror is the opening for great personal help. He will be a schoolmaster and elder brother to them both, and in this relationship supply the stimulus and curb they respectively require. In this way Bill the Silent will be discovered as a man of unexpected thought, and force, and sympathy ; while Bill the Conqueror will be doubled in value by being reduced to a sense of his own proportion. True discipline proves not a bar to friendship, but rather its most essential aspect. For the boy does not have a schoolmaster at his side when such an influence is usually most operative, and elder brothers offer little by way of advice and warning. A substitute is sadly needed, and confidence in the judgment of Mr. X. saves the Heads and many others from silly mistakes. They respond very quickly to personality,

conceive a warm affection for any elder man who tries to help them. Their genius for friendship leads to a spontaneous desire to give and receive confidence; they are swayed and moulded the more easily by example and suggestion. An element of true discipline in the club will prevent this tendency to affection from developing into an unwholesome and dangerous familiarity. A very wise admixture of love and authority produces perfect discipline.

The club, however, has uses and attractions more obvious to the Heads. Their daily work may tire and dullen them, without developing either limbs or mind. A club provides them with every opportunity for systematic exercise. Boxing and wrestling will make them hardy and supple, and teach them to look every man in the face. Billiards will train the eyes and steady the hand, and even draughts and dominoes have some subtle influence on manners and morals, when played by strict rules in the atmosphere of a club, where fair play is valued above victory, and gambling is not needed as an accessory to the interest of the game. It is quite certain that, as they grow accustomed to play every game for its own sake with zest and fairness, they are adding to their calibre, and learning to hate all secrecy and trickery. For Fatty and Percy there is drill and every form of gymnastic exercise, the very conditions of which are habits of health and cleanliness. Long-distance running has of late come into great vogue, and though it may be contended that five or seven miles in the evening on rough roads is a heavy tax for anyone who has already worked for ten hours, it cannot be denied that this stern athleticism demands a more careful life. When setting out for a club-run through the streets of the City, along the Embankment, and home by Westminster Bridge, the Heads, for obvious reasons, first wash their bare legs, though many other athletes would only find this necessary on their return. But the washing of legs is not enough to win a race. A stricter diet, omitting pastry, sweets, and cigarettes, becomes almost a fixed habit for poor Fatty

throughout the year, and Percy must go to bed an hour earlier than aforetime. All this is building a stronger race of men and fathers, addicted to a more regular life, demanding those baths and better houses which the pessimism of the nineteenth century has denied them.

It is good for Buster's mind to be full of league football and county cricket, for these are live, clean things, and without them his quick mind and ready tongue may sink to far less reputable topics of thought and conversation. But it is far better still that he should play cricket and football himself on Saturday afternoons. The rules of cricket are so framed as to be an almost exact parallel of the best moral code ; the spirit of football—help your side to score without fouling—is the spirit also of life. Several conditions are necessary to make the ethics of these games really effective. There must be intense keenness, continuity of play, rigorous adherence to rules and conventions. It was found that when the Heads grouped themselves into a team of their own accord, gathering each Friday night at the sweetstuff shop to pick the eleven, they did not hold together for very long. The captain was too autocratic or too lax ; the motives of the committee and the accuracy of the treasurer were not above suspicion. A run of successes carried them on, but six successive losses played havoc with the loyalty of the team, and a Saturday came when only four of the most faithful reached the field of play. The very captain was among the deserters, preferring to adopt the easier rôle of a spectator at the " Spurs " or " Arsenal " cup-ties rather than lead half a team to defeat. When their headquarters are at some boys' club, they secure thereby a measure of permanence. They may choose their own captain, and be responsible for their own finances (far better so) ; but their position as the representatives of a whole club gives them more confidence. They receive more encouragement, awaken more interest, procure, very possibly, the services of a strict referee or umpire, and are held more firmly to the honour of the game. The service

rendered by the London County Council in the provision of free pitches for cricket and football in their open spaces, and by the Playing Fields Society in the letting of full-sized grounds at low rents, cannot be praised too highly. They have earned the gratitude of every boys' club where games are played in organized fashion, for without them serious cricket and football would be well-nigh impossible. The only drawback lies in the growing demand for fresh spaces. London is so choked by a ring of spreading suburbs that the freedom of a grassy field is hard to find. Some day the gates of Hyde Park will be flung open wide, and the cricketers from the river-side will bat and bowl in these idle pastures.

Many clubs are actively engaged in promoting the further education of working boys, and some achieve remarkable results in this direction. By a close co-operation with the evening schools in the neighbourhood, it is possible to lay before every boy a course of evening study suited to his taste and capacity, and likely to prove of great benefit to his future. Great sums of money and an unspeakable amount of thought and labour, both in teaching and organization, are spent ungrudgingly every winter. A few exceptional boys owe their advance in life, and their whole development of mind, to these efforts. They learn shorthand, and typewriting, and foreign correspondence, and climb to posts of high responsibility in their City office. Others are taught mechanics, machine-drawing, and all the arts and crafts which will enable them to succeed their father as plumber or engineer. Yet these few are wonderfully few when measured by the magnitude of the effort made to help them and the multitude of the class from which they come. The reasons of this disappointment are not far to seek.

The Heads have never attended evening classes with any regularity at all. Bill the Conqueror and Buster are clever boys, with bright faces, quick to pick up. They have always found it easy to learn, but they have always stopped halfway. Ten hours' work in the day does not tire their mind, because it has probably not made any use of it at

all; but they are certainly jaded, and find it difficult to concentrate on any subject that has not immediate interest. They can appreciate songs, talk, and moving pictures, but any study which makes a real demand on their powers, and does more than tickle the senses and imagination, will soon forfeit their attention. They have often been persuaded to enrol themselves at an evening school in the middle of September, but by Christmas they are liable to give up the struggle, and spend their spare time in less exacting occupations. A thriving school with first-rate teachers will have 800 names on its register by the middle of November, and there will be 500 names by Easter, when nearly all educational programmes collapse. But even these figures are a little delusive, for on narrow scrutiny it will be found that a large number of the gallant 500 who finished at Easter only joined the classes in January, and that a very small proportion indeed of the original 800 survived the full six months. One season's tuition in most subjects is of comparatively little value, but there are few even among these who are faithful for a full session who continue their course for a number of years. Nearly every boy under twenty has at some time or another been to evening classes, but only a tiny minority have persevered and obtained the consecutive teaching of a three years' course. The teachers work gallantly against many odds; the organization is perfected by every device that experience and real earnestness can devise. Yet in the end the system is all but defeated in the case of the average boy by the long hours of his work and the uncertainty of his overtime. Bill the Conqueror promised to attend regularly, and paid his admission fee in three successive autumns. In December each year overtime became the rule rather than the exception. For three weeks he would be absent, and after that unwilling to return. At present the conditions of his daily work constitute so serious a handicap that the efforts of clubs and evening schools to continue his education are altogether thwarted.

There are brilliant exceptions. Some boys will climb any obstacle, and will learn when all others are asleep or at play. But the Heads are only average boys, and are overcome by the circumstances of work and home. Until these are altered, the great opportunities of education will only reach a sparse minority.

On certain evenings in the week Fatty may be seen walking through the streets clutching a carbine with attempted nonchalance, as though it were really only an umbrella of some new design. Playful remarks fly after him from some passing girls, who think that a gun makes a boy in mufti look ridiculous. But this latest recruit to the Territorials takes the chaff of his friends in good part, keeps his head up, and attends his recruit drills very steadily. The system of training does not occupy much of his spare time at present, and so escapes the difficulties of overtime and social engagements. The few evenings devoted to it are well spent, contributing to the appearance no less than the character of the boy. The fortnight in camp during August is the time when Fatty (who will soon lose his name) really benefits in every way. The unemployed and chronic loafers are not accepted in the Territorials, so that he is thrown among decent working fellows like himself, and is all the better for the comradeship of camp. He returns to work thoroughly fit, far more alert in sense and limb, and if he is not a very experienced soldier, he is, at any rate, a manlier citizen. As an instrument of general education and social service, the Territorial movement can have no critics.

## CHAPTER X

### A BOY'S CHARACTER AND RELIGION

MUCH has been said of a boy's spare time, for it is during this period of his life that his character is forming, and it is on that uncertain process that the happiness of his whole life will depend. The forces which sway a boy's impulses

or stiffen his will-power come very largely in the hours of freedom, when a choice of occupations and companions is open before him. It is probable that by the age of twenty his character will have set, tendencies have hardened into qualities, and the manner of the man will be determined. It is well, therefore, to review briefly the warring forces and instincts of a boy in these five years of transition.

There is nothing dour, grim, or reticent in the being or the manner of the London boy. A lifelong diet of tea, cheap jam, and fish produces a more vivacious and neurotic lad than is commonly found in the North. His speech is quicker, his ideas more chaotic, his motives a more inconsequent series. A boy who has drunk in from early infancy the moving life and spirits of the streets can never be so deliberate of intention, so dilatory in judgment, as the country child. One mood is immediately succeeded by its opposite. The Chaplain-General may enthral him for thirty minutes, and keep him in an ecstasy of attention, for there is no stillness like the absorption of a hundred noisy boys. Two minutes after the service is at an end, the babel of noise makes the cynic smile and think it all of no account. But he is wrong. The London boy is so elastic that the volume of the subsequent noise is an eloquent witness to the deep impression of five minutes before. It is unfair to blame the boy for showing a vacillating and inconsistent disposition. But the quick transience of mood and motive makes his character the more difficult to gauge or mould. His emotional and affectionate temperament give him a charm and buoyancy that will often lead others to overrate his worth, and cause them much subsequent disappointment. He is easily drawn to a higher level, but easily slips back for what are apparently the most trivial of reasons. He rises again to the higher level, and climbs beyond it, and whether he is at the top or bottom, is apt to regard his condition with a measure of self-complacency that is not without charm. No interest can obsess him permanently, and he rarely shows, either

in work or game, the application of his brothers across the Tweed. On Fridays and Saturdays the football captain is a proud and distinguished figure, his mind enveloped in the fortunes of the game, and he seems to live for nothing else. Yet on the following Wednesday, at the annual meeting of the club, he is unaccountably absent, and it is rumoured that he has gone to Lewisham to see an aunt.

All boys are forgetful, but the phases of the London boy are more baffling than usual, and make it difficult to see beneath the surface the permanent qualities of a single identity. His enemies will call him a hypocrite, but they are unfair in this, for behind these rapid changes there is, as a rule, no attempt to deceive ; they merely reflect the chaos and inconsequence of a boy's motives. In this way it happens that the growth of character is not a single spasm nor a smooth and regular process, but is rather to be compared to the needle of a compass which swings backwards and forwards for a time before it gradually steadies itself and settles down ; and from that moment it points in a fixed direction. If it be argued that this is true of all men, it would be fair to answer that with the London boy at this period the preliminary skirmishes of the needle are more violent and prolonged, and do not seem governed by the ordinary laws of the pendulum.

There is much in the life of the working boy to coarsen his mind and upset his better instincts. A brief survey of his general character has showed that he has all the natural qualities of a gambler. The opportunities for gratifying such instincts are frequent and seductive. While yet a schoolboy, he played pitch-and-toss with secret exuberance on the stairs of his buildings ; now that he is older, a group of his mates may entice him to the flat roof of the model buildings some early Sunday morning, and there, under the sky, 150 feet above the river, a game of " banker " will be screened from the notice of police and parent. Even boys who live in better houses are drawn into the practice of betting. In a large number of City offices and river-side

factories and warehouses it is the annual custom to hold a sweepstake on the " Derby " or the " Oaks." Even if he had any convictions on the point, the office-boy of fourteen could hardly be expected to stand out from the general subscription and refuse his sixpence. Should he be lucky enough to draw a horse, he will be chaffed genially about his chances, and will learn how to find out from the evening paper the odds against the horse that he has drawn. His interest awakened, he may be led to place another rare sixpence in the hope of doubling an uncertain gain. The petty technique of betting fascinates a quick mind, and whether he wins or loses in his first effort, he is likely to continue reading the sporting news, occasionally risking an odd shilling. This is most true, where he is not allowed by his employer, or not encouraged by a club to take an interest in football and cricket. In a year or two the amount of his weekly risk has increased out of all proportion to the slow rise in his wages, and has become a serious drain on his resources. Betting is an elusive evil, confounding argument by the subtlety of its nature, but there are three clear ways in which it spoils the life of the working boy. First, it costs him more than he can afford—for on a year's betting every boy loses. Secondly, it produces an unhealthy craving for excitement, which makes him a bad worker. Thirdly, it brings inevitably with it a flashy and material order of life, which weakens the hold of moral principle and excludes the spirit of religion.

Few boys are to be seen in these days inside a public-house ; the habit of drinking to excess does not seem to come till a later age, and there are many signs that here, too, there is a great abatement. But while the abuse of alcohol grows every year more rare, the insidious forms of moral evil threaten the boy at every step. As an infant the words of vice were familiar to his ears. If he scrambled too far from the door of home, his mother (a decent woman) recalled him by foul, unmeaning words that blasphemed and degraded her own motherhood. At school, before he

was fourteen, older boys hinted at some of the secrets of life. Indecency is not so rare in an elementary school. At the place of his work, pictures of vice will be passed round, little pamphlets of foul suggestion will be lent to him. The recent increase in this kind of printing is a somewhat alarming symptom of laxity in opinion, if not in conduct. These vile seductions come to the boy at a dangerous age. The restless cravings of impurity within are fomented by the open tolerance of vice, and many a lad who left school in all innocence has fallen into evil ways before he is twenty. When to these special forms of temptation are added all those adverse influences of poverty which tend to make all men careless of exact truth or honesty, it will be seen that the growing character is stiffly handicapped by the forces of evil, and less wonder will be felt if some bright-faced boys turn in a few years to sullen, irresolute and vicious loafers.

In the lives of some boys there is something to hold them back, and give them the self-control which keeps moral danger at arm's length. One has a good mother, and her nature is woven into his, bringing a strength and natural goodness which responds to her appeals, and reaches after her standards. Another has a cautious, self-preservative instinct which enables him to mix freely with all he meets and yet to "look after himself, and do nothing foolish," as he assures an older friend with quaint yet justified conceit. Many boys are distracted from taste for gambling by more solid interests. The real antidote to all boyish failings is some form of education and discipline (as outlined in the description of a boys' club) which provides distractions from the baser things in life, and in these new objects of interest teaches a firmer self-control. It is a fine thing, reflects the boy, to swagger at a street corner in a pearl-buttoned waistcoat, and name the odds on each horse in the St. Leger with indifference, but it is a finer thing still to pace up the street in shorts and striped jersey at the head of a panting line. The boy who has given his heart to Saturday cricket, and who sleeps at night with one

eye on the headship of the league, has no spare time or thought for anything so abstract as horse-racing.

Moreover, a club offers him duties and responsibilities. He may become an official or member of the club committee, and now and then is left in charge. A number of small duties devolve on him ; in him are vested powers of exclusion and discrimination. In helping to govern others he learns self-control, and finding that his stability and good-will is assumed, lives up to this new standard. New ideas of form and convention possess his mind, and he begins to place muscle above scarf-pins. The clean, healthy boy who is constantly taking violent physical exercise can never brood over his temptations. The spirit of a good club is against loafers ; the hero-worship of the younger boy leads him to emulate the athlete rather than the dressy spindle-shanks who " knows a thing or two." Legislation may improve the earlier conditions of a boy's life, and so reduce the handicap against him in his moral struggle, but it can never rob life of its temptations. The common-sense cure for those who are falling is the distraction afforded by more healthy pursuits and the building of a surer self-control.

The boy is not naturally reflective. He will walk along a street on his way to work every morning of the year, and never know its name, pass a huge building and never wonder whether it is a bakery or a prison. Thus it comes about that he might see a church in every other street and a parson on every third doorstep, and yet never ask himself very pointedly what all this religion is about, and whether he could have any use for it. He is rarely or never hostile ; on the whole, if he ever thinks about it at all, he is glad that there is a church in the street and a parson close at hand. But his point of view is normally that of a friendly looker-on. Only a fifth of the children attend Sunday-school, and barely 1 per cent. are to be found there after the emancipating age of fourteen. The very choir boys are likely to desert at the same age, and it is a grave question

as to whether they are not the worse for the part they have taken in the church services for five years past.

Though a mere outsider, the average boy recognizes tacitly that religion is right, or, as he would put it, "the Christian life is the best." He associates it with abstention from certain habits, and thinks of it as a path to almost certain prosperity. It is unfortunate, but perhaps inevitable, that the steady church-going fellow should work with greater diligence and gain promotion earlier than the rougher lad. This respectability of the church-going section robs Christianity of its old ideals. No longer in the garb of poverty, but in the glossiest of hats and the longest of frock-coats does the typical Christian reveal the supremacy of his faith.

Evil assumes such a very definite and hideous shape that virtue is more unmistakable than usual. A boy's understanding proceeds very largely by contrast, and he recognizes transparent virtue by its marked difference from all that he knows to be wrong. A very acute division arises in his mind between good and evil, Christian and un-Christian. The former does not drink, or swear, or gamble, and goes to concerts, but never to a music-hall. On the positive side little more is demanded than that he should dress better and go to his Sunday service. There is a great gulf fixed, and it is easy to tell on which side a boy elects to stand, for the gambling and swearing test occurs almost every day of the week. This violent distinction between white and black, losing sight of the fact that all men are a dullish grey, is meant to reflect an undoubted spiritual truth, that all men are either struggling or sliding, but it does so in an unfortunate way. Virtue has become abstention from vice, and the line between them is the rigid line that divides positive and negative.

This view of religion does equal harm to both sides. Those who have forsaken what is wrong are tempted to think the struggle over, and lose sight of the hills beyond, while the ordinary boy is too honest to think himself possessed of

great moral force, and cannot face such an utter change of life. He is moderately happy where he is. He confesses that the other kind of life is a better one, though he has, as a rule, little love for the men who lead it, and has many a story to illustrate the inconsistency of some notorious "Christian" employer. He will advance these shortcomings of the good as a preliminary reason for not joining the ranks, but soon shifts his ground a good deal nearer the truth and explains that "it's no good for me, because I should never stick it, with all the fellows chipping me, and all." For virtue is so distinct that the beginning is very conspicuous, and excites much comment. It is inevitable that the boy should draw a hard line, where vice and virtue both seem so exaggerated; and it is perhaps well that there should be a reluctance to begin the profession of faith when he sees so little chance of living up to it.

So long as the boy is ready to believe that religion is right, but very loath to begin its practice, it will be seen that the difficulties of the clergy in this direction are very considerable. Three dangers at least face their eagerness. Any measure of formalism in religion may for the moment excite awe and wonder, but it will leave the boy convinced more firmly than before that it is all beyond him, the language and spirit of a world where he has no place. It is true that he asks rather too much when he expects to be able to understand everything, and gain an answer from religion to every question. Yet care may well be taken to make the services simple and the appeal direct.

This does not mean that there should be anything ecstatic or unduly emotional. Here lies the second danger, for the London boy is far too prone already to yield to such methods. The result of an emotional appeal is but a temporary access, which gives place, as a rule, to a most deplorable reaction. Every precaution should be taken against any such possibility, for there is always a slightly effeminate strain in the river-side boy, and every effort is needed to brace him into a hardy manliness.

A third danger lies, oddly enough, in a very different direction. A boy sometimes thinks that the power of a religious faith is some objective force that comes from outside to arm him against all troubles, and makes possible the complete abdication of will-power. This conception of religion as a substitute for will, releasing him from all the minor struggles of choice and desire, will explain many a lad's fall. He expected that it was all going to be done for him, and that he would walk along a clear path. The slowly-forming character of the working boy may indeed suffer sadly by the unwise presentation of religious truth.

There are ways, however, in which religion may and must appeal to all that is good in a boy, reveal much that was never expected in him, and then, by quick and natural growth, possess and permeate his whole being, till without shame or effrontery he takes his place as a regular worshipper and worker in the Church of Christ. The force of corporate worship and common service, so vital a power to the heroes of earlier days, awakes still a response in the boy's indifferent heart. Alone and by himself, the course of conviction and practice is no smooth one. But when gathered together with others of like mood and age in club, brigade, patrol, or Bible-class, religion is a more natural and spontaneous growth The spirit of the places interprets so much that is dry and difficult at first; well-remembered hymns hammer it in with relentless rhythm; high, unselfish ideals are no longer quixotic. It is in a brotherhood of some kind that boys learn, it is in a brotherhood that they will keep their pledges of purity and devotion, and it is as a brotherhood that they will serve others. This power is nowhere so manifest as in the summer camp. A boy is always at his best under the sky. Perhaps by its associations, perhaps by its rude simplicity, a tent at night seems to awaken inner natures that have been asleep all through the year. A camp with no definitely religious purpose, with the most nominal service and perfunctory chaplain, still serves as a reminder of old forgotten better

thoughts, and all the serious strands that get somehow woven into every careless life. A small complacent little youth of fourteen arrived at camp for the first time one August day, looked round at the tents, the hedges, and the swimming bath, and then put his hands in his pockets, and remarked, " I've never seen anything like this in my life before "; and by the end of the week he would have been able to say he had never felt anything quite like camp ; but that is not the sort of thing small boys talk about.

Further help in this direction comes from the idea of voluntary service as the natural and necessary accompaniment of religious belief. Rewards for attendance at Sunday service or Bible-class, undue privileges for communicants or committee boys, prove to be deadly enemies to a boy's religious development. The system will long survive in the Sunday-schools, but at fourteen a boy is ready for a new discipline, which shall teach him that the reward for work is more work, the answer to worship is a demand for further sacrifice. Let the boy who shows signs of religious conviction be set to work at one of a hundred rough tasks in his club or church. There is a double gain in this. The dangers of unconscious hypocrisy—strangely great in quick, unthinking boys—will be securely guarded against ; and the boy's idea of true religion will be set along healthy lines. He will grow to be an active layman, no mute clergy-fed worshipper. The scrubbing of a floor, the visiting of " slackers," the delivery of club magazines and notices, are humdrum duties, but when undertaken as rewards, they may become the very sacrament of Christian service.

Side by side with the readiness to work at unromantic tasks there must grow within the boy a life of private devotion. Otherwise work will become a fetish, an end, in itself, and the boy who has scrubbed his floor or tramped on a weary round will be in danger of that complacency which folds its hands and conceives all religious obligations to be at an end. But religion cannot be part of a weekly programme, punctuated by work and pleasure. It is a life

and a spirit, issuing in many noble acts ; but it is not possible to take a string of unselfish deeds, apart from the inner source which inspires them, and call these religion. Rather is it the whole of every day, containing in itself pleasure and idleness. It is because it is not possible to oppose the part to the whole that the dualism of pleasure and religion is absurd. Slowly, very slowly, will the Christian Gospel thus absorb the boy's whole self, and attune all his tastes and occupations to the Platonic ὕμνος which is the secret of happiness. This only comes when the boy has faced himself, and found his real faith in moments by himself. He is not always willing to speak freely about this, but if he is saying his daily prayers and reading for his own help some verses of the Bible, he is winning his way to a strength of spirit that will be a tower and bulwark not only to himself, but to many a weaker friend. This discipline of the inner life is the stern necessity for prolonged and constant faith, and the overcoming goodness which "makes the fairest lilies bloom at the very gates of hell."

This ideal of meditation and devotion, almost monastic in its demand, seems far removed from the cheeky van-boy. Suggestions of private prayers and the reading of the Bible seem to ignore the scant privacy of a 12-foot bedroom with four noisy occupants. Is this indeed the same world as that in which a carpenter was Christ and a shoemaker became a saint ?

If it is not so, then the clergy of South London have made a strange mistake. These forgotten men, not always majestic in appearance or eloquent in speech, lead happy lives of unobtrusive service. They have surrendered all that they might work there ; their reward comes neither in money nor in visible success ; they never know one half the sympathy and gratitude they earn. The depression of a long drab summer afternoon spent in visiting specious or sullen mothers, the idle men, and the uncomplaining sick, may tear their hopes or ruffle their humour. Orators in the park beat wildly against them, gossip and scandal dissect,

and rub, and bite, but the old black guard never wavers. For they have learnt the great secret, which is no secret, and know for ever that Christianity is hope, and that if a boy in a rough home or warehouse is to lead the clean and helping life, to build a character that is strong without conceit, he must find the help and follow the pattern of Christ.

## CHAPTER XI

### YOUTHFUL OFFENDERS

THE race of life is hurrying on from boyhood to manhood, but a few drop out from the straight course each year. Perhaps they had little stamina at the very start, or lacked the proper equipment for running in the heat of the day; possibly the rules were too hard. There are few sadder things than the first serious stumble of a boy. Dazed by the sudden change in horizon, vaguely aware that he may be " put away " for many years, he endures torments that are not without effect. His mother covers him with a storm of reproach, hints very clearly at the gallows, stupefies him with abuse, brings him to tears by her own weeping; while to the world she defends him bitterly with a blind eye to the truth, asserting at every pause that " he has always been a good boy, and if he is let off just this once he will never do it again." Yet not such a sad moment to the reflective, for with proper understanding and treatment of the boy it is more than probable that this will be both the first and last offence. There may have been one specific cause for the offence which makes it an unexpected lapse from a steady record, but it is more probably the first outward symptom of a secret deterioration. The elements of a boyish crime are a desire for something, the opportunity to obtain it with probable impunity, the lack of self-control to restrain him. Crime begins as soon as the urchin is tall enough to stand on tip-toe and see the penny on the top of the kitchen dresser, which his mother has put there

for the milkman when he calls. He is not old enough to calculate the chances of detection, but the desire for sweets is strong within him, and with one sticky grab he enters on a career of crime.

While at school the desire for money grows as the ways of spending increase. A few pence in pocket make a holiday infinitely more happy and adventurous for him and his " mates "; a tram will take them farther afield ; there will be the means of refreshment ; and perhaps these gay young fellows in the seventh standard may like to finish up with an hour at " the moving pictures." A schoolboy rarely has tasted the pleasures of dress, but in a few years ties and waistcoats will tempt him. Only sixpence a week remains, as a rule, for pocket-money, and this will not go far if a taste for music-halls and mild gambling begins to show itself. Later on come periods of unemployment, when the desire for money is great indeed, when every shop window and every open door is a fierce temptation. Long hours of idle wandering and disappointment are twice dangerous—they make the need of money more urgent, while weakening the power of resistance.

The second factor is the opportunity, and here, again, the way is clear to the young offender. The open stalls in the road, piled high with oranges and nuts, offer an easy practice-ground to the young " artful dodger." Penny-in-the-slot gas meters protect their wealth by a thin plating of tin, easily broken by any instrument in the hand of a small Bill Sykes. Employers are sometimes a little lax in the checking of petty cash expenses, and the office-boy notices that the stamp account is a possible source of a little weekly bonus. The more adventurous will find many doors insecurely fastened, and cash-boxes in full view within, their old locks responsive to any piece of bent wire.

The third factor, most marked in offences against the person, is a lack of self-control. There may be a burning desire, opportunity and secrecy may be assured, but if there is sufficient restraint from within the act will never

be committed. Unhappily, this self-control is not too common in South London, and it is not so easily taught to boy or man. In many lives impulse reigns, reason and moral instinct only being summoned after the act to consider the future and condemn the past. It is because impulse so largely governs the London boy that many juvenile offences seem unaccountable, and the boy can only suggest that " something seemed to come over me like, and I did it." There is a ready forgiveness in most London hearts for small offences against truth and honesty, and the boy is thus without the very definite prohibition which holds back other small hands, and makes us a nation of honest and successful shopkeepers. When the reasons against stealing are not very clear-cut, and the power to resist desire far from strong, it might seem miraculous that only a sparse minority of working boys fall into the hands of the police. Yet it must be remembered that though there is no clear notion of *meum* and *tuum* implanted in the boy, yet honesty is a natural and almost mechanical quality with him. It is indeed the best policy, as commercial an asset as a pair of strong arms—in fact, the very condition that work imposes. Thus honesty with a working boy is the rule, and dishonesty a rare exception.

It will be readily surmised that, since the desires of youth are greedy rather than vindictive, the great majority of juvenile offences are cases of theft. There is always a stream of high-spirited fellows in the police-court summoned for playing football, or swearing, or gambling in the street, and dismissed with a few words of advice and a small fine ; but the proper " youthful offender " is one arrested on a more serious charge. There is an occasional variation in the direction of assault or moral offence, but nine-tenths of the boys arrested are charged with some form of larceny.

Ten years have seen a revolution in the treatment of these boys. There has been a total change of principle and point of view. The old heresy of making the punishment fit the crime, although set to haunting music in a more

cheerful context, has given place to a new theory, by which the punishment is made to fit the criminal. When a boy is apprehended for the first time and brought before the bench, and his guilt fully proved, the magistrate is asked to view the actual offence not as the chief guide in determining punishment, but as a mere index or symptom of his general condition. It is upon what the boy is, and not upon the single act committed, that the magistrate will focus his attention. This is the true point of view of the optimist who remembers that the boy is only a beginner, and stands at the most critical stage of life. Losing sight of the crime, save as evidence of character, and thinking only of the young criminal and his points of weakness, the magistrate is led to weigh alternative methods of treatment, rather than measure out by mere arithmetic a dose of imprisonment.

Yet boys are quick to measure the gravity of the offence by the amount of punishment it brings, and any treatment of juvenile offenders must carry with it such penalties of discipline and hard work as are likely to deter the friends of the accused from ever following his example. Thus, while a rebuilding of character is the main object of reformative treatment, no method can be satisfactory which makes the process so easy and delightful as to rob it of a certain sting and struggle, which should be associated instinctively in the mind of every boy as a necessary consequence of guilt. The reformer that is needed must have something of the Spartan in him, and show both hope and penetration. He will have two clear objects before him. He must, in the first place, fill the boy's life and mind with such fresh interests and occupations as may serve to distract his mind. An emptiness of life produces a distorted moral vision, in which the needs and desires of self are predominant. Acts of vice and dishonesty are committed at such moments when the boy's thoughts are obsessed by the momentary gratification of his desire. The boy out of work steals because hunger has obliterated all else in his mind. Another suffers from the brooding desires of

immorality, because there is a lack of healthy interests to banish vile thoughts.

It is not surprising, then, to find that boyish crimes are most commonly committed in the stress of unemployment. It is further true that, as a rule, boys in prison have few hobbies or pastimes. They are not great cricketers or politicians ; the country boys have little interest in flowers or birds ; the standard of elementary education and general knowledge is abnormally low. For reasons such as these it is that the poor man becomes a criminal, while a richer man of the same moral weakness, who can buy a different distraction every month, remains legally innocent. The provision of hard work, education, games, and hobbies will go far to reduce the claims of self to a more reasonable proportion.

Yet even when sufficient distractions have arisen to enlarge his vision, and occupy his mind with a more varied programme, there will be danger of a sudden reversion to old ways. Thus the second object of the reformer is to build character, to induce habits of restraint. For it is only by a growth in the powers of self-control that a sudden relapse will be averted.

Such, in brief, are the principles upon which the new treatment of juvenile offenders is slowly developing. It is now to the true advantage of the guilty boy to be prosecuted, in order that the causes of his deterioration may be discovered and firmly arrested. The mercy of the employer who refuses to inform the police and merely dismisses the boy is now sadly misplaced. The boy in such a case can only get casual and unskilled work, for other employers would need a reference, and that would be fatal to his chances. There is no one set over him to guide and warn and encourage, no discipline imposed ; on the contrary, there is every reason why he should steal again. As soon as the growing elasticity and reasonableness of the present system is realized, employers will with confidence prosecute their office-boys and junior clerks, while mere dismissal will rank as the lazy indifference of a callous and uncharitable man.

The youthful offender under sixteen is no longer charged in the ordinary police-court among the old and hardened prisoners. The proceeding is stripped of the glamour which so curiously attaches to the sordid precincts of a police-court, for the case is heard quietly in an ordinary room, where the formalities are as simple as possible, and from which the admiring public is excluded. When reports in the press, which seek to make childish theft funny and heroic, have been finally prohibited, there will be no pride in the small boy's heart, but something a little nearer shame.

If the case is proved, the boy is usually remanded for a week. Conviction is only the first half of the magistrate's duty ; with young offenders, the second half, which consists in adopting a method of treatment, is quite as important, and demands much inquiry and evidence as to his home-life, character, and prospects. During these days of waiting, the boy under sixteen, if not released on bail, is sent to a remand home, where he will be retained under wise discipline till he is due again at the children's court. There is a strange and sad little crowd at such places, coming and going, none staying for more than a fortnight, and some but for a night. The youngest is not yet in trousers, and was found at midnight on a doorstep, with no mark of identity. He will be charged with wandering—though, in truth he cannot walk—and the law, with another twinkle in its grey eyes, will go on to complain that he had no visible means of subsistence. Such a child will spend his second birthday happily enough in the shelter of some home, where he will stay till he is a strong lad of sixteen. The older ones do not look very desperate, though hunger and short nights have begun to mark their faces. They spend the week at work in the classes of the remand home, playing in the yard, not altogether averse to their captivity, though a little alarmed at the uncertainty of the future.

When the boy again appears at court, the magistrate is informed of the result of inquiries, and is able to form some idea of his character. If under fourteen, he may not be

sent to prison, but there are twelve alternative methods of the treatment, detailed with some pride by a clause in the Children Act. If the surroundings at home seem unfavourable, he will be committed to an industrial or reformatory school. To the former are sent innocent children under fourteen whose parents are unfit or missing, together with a few real offenders who are very young. The reformatory school only receives children, up to the age of sixteen, who have committed an offence which would be in an adult punishable by imprisonment. Thus the industrial school is filled with younger children, who are there through their parents' shortcomings rather than their own; while the reformatory school has need of a sterner discipline, for it contains the older children, each of whom has committed some act of violence or dishonesty.

If there is a good mother and a well-ordered home, the young offender will not be sent away by the wise magistrate, for there is no home like home. Stripped of all the cant sentiment that surrounds it, the value of life at home still remains for every boy a vast, unanswerable fact. But where the offenders (the great majority of whom are boys) have no home, or one barely worthy of the name, they will be sent to a reformatory or industrial school, where they will stay till they are judged ready and fit for working life. These schools develop them in body by much drill and well-organized games, teach them to work skilfully and steadily, and continue their elementary education till they have reached a standard of average proficiency.

Such schools vary far too greatly in their efficiency and moral tone. It is true that the value of the school as a reforming agency must always depend very largely upon the personality of the superintendent, yet it may not be out of place to point to three general points of weakness in the present system. In the first place, the financial position of most schools makes it necessary for the governing committee to rely to some extent on the profits accruing from the work of the boys. This position affects the in-

dustrial training of the boys, by forcing the authorities to view the institution now and then as a manufacturing business rather than an educational and moral agency. Secondly, the stardards and methods of discipline appear often to harden and embitter rather than build up habits of self-control. Finally, there is a laxity in the supervision of boys discharged on licence which nullifies in many cases the good effects of four years' training. When these difficulties have been overcome, and the schools staffed throughout by the right type of men, the great volume of thought and work and generosity represented by these schools will reap an even greater reward than at present.

After sixteen the young thief is too old for such schools. Yet, even so, prison is no longer the necessary punishment. He may, like any other offender, be put on probation for twelve months. In this case the sentence is deferred for a year, during which time he has an opportunity to retrieve his character, and is given the advice and assistance of a probation officer. If he takes advantage of this respite, and settles to regular work, he will hear no more of the matter; but should the probation officer, in one of his weekly reports, have reason to complain that the boy has broken the terms of his promise, the offender is brought summarily to the police-court, and sentence passed upon him. This new system of probation applies to offenders of any age and either sex. It is the recognition by the State of such certain facts in daily life as personal influence and genuine repentance.

Many boys take full advantage of their period of probation, and never appear again in the police-court. Stump, for instance, was a doubtful case, but in the end justified the system. He had formed a group of adventurous boys for purposes of petty larceny, and, though most of them were barely seventeen, they succeeded in capturing a good deal on crowded nights from the stalls in the road. Stump was undoubtedly the worst offender, and the police, to whom many complaints had been made, were not sorry

when they succeeded at last in catching him red-handed—with a second-hand skirt under his arm, which he had snatched from the barrow of an old-clothes dealer. He had long been known to be a thief, but this was in the eyes of the law his first offence. The magistrate was such an optimist as to see the germ of good in Mr. Stump, aged seventeen, though his appearance was neither honest nor attractive. It appeared, moreover, that he had never had much of a chance, for his home was a poor one, he had never been to work since he left school, and he had no decent friends. Conviction and sentence were accordingly postponed, and he was handed over for twelve months to the care of a probation officer. Now came his chance. Work was found for him, and, though he felt ten hours a day in a factory a very grim change from the unchecked independence of the street-life, there was enough character in his small squat person to repress his yearnings and make him a steady workman. He was made a member of a boys' club, and spent most of his evenings in cheerful company, acquiring many new interests and topics. They taught him to box and run. Some evenings he might be seen darting along the road in club colours, past the very stalls where he used to snatch and pilfer Summer found him at camp, fast friends with his newly-found set of ordinary working boys, still rather surly in face and manner, but beginning to be recognized as an occasional wit and a stanch sportsman. His character, when developed, had many surprises for his friends, and Stump is now a pillar of society, as immovable as a churchwarden. This natural and friendly supervision has done far better for him than the expensive machinery of prison.

If probation seems too lenient, or has already proved unsuitable, a boy between sixteen and twenty-one may now be sent to a Borstal institution. The minimum sentence is twelve months, and a longer period will insure a greater chance of reform. Under this treatment (either at Borstal, near Rochester, or at Feltham), the boy learns to work

hard without stopping for a minute ; he is subjected to a stern discipline, but finds that by hard work and good conduct he may gain certain privileges of association and liberty. He is discharged only on licence, and is supervised with some vigilance. If on regaining liberty he shows no disposition to work and live honestly, his licence is revoked, and he serves an additional three months.

This is but a bare summary of a great thoughtful plan to save the beginner from a career of crime. Behind it is an effort to distinguish one type from another, and provide alternative methods of treatment ; and in any treatment proposed for young offenders is a desire to distract them from the bad and to rebuild the good.

## CHAPTER XII

### MARRIAGE

MARRIAGE, the most common of all youthful offences, marks the decisive change from boy to man, and is thus the very hinge of life. Education is at an end, work has been chosen, and character nearly formed. The long sequel of forty years or more lies before him As long as he stayed at home, adding his ten or twelve shillings to the family funds, he was a boy and a son ; but when he takes a wife and rents a room or two of his own, he becomes a man and a husband, all too likely to forget that he still remains a son. Marriage seems to be accepted as a normal and expected landmark to be passed at about this time. It is certainly surprising to see how few men remain single after twenty-five.

There are a number of practical reasons to account for this readiness to incur the burden of a family. The boy of eighteen begins to find that home comforts are not satisfying. With his wages he can reasonably expect a little more consideration and independence. The younger children make the house turbulent and dirty. His mother's

habits are a little messy, and he hardly cares to ask a friend to come home with him. His sister monopolizes the passage or the doorstep for an interview with her young man. He observes that the family has grown larger, and its demands on space more various, while the size of the house remains the same. He may try the pseudo-independence of lodgings, but usually finds them an expensive and unreal luxury. Meals must be cooked, beds made, and rooms scrubbed out ; no one will do this for mere board and lodging save a wife. Such considerations do not of themselves drive a youth to marriage, but they pave the way for natural affection, and add reason to desire. The girl herself desires a similar independence from a crowded home, and she knows well that, if she would marry at all, it must be while she is young. For few women marry after thirty by the river-side.

Yet this is not the full tale. The Cockney boy is just as affectionate as the Celt ; he has not the latter's serious passion, but he does possess a quaint sarcasm and quick criticism, which makes him an even more delightful companion. If the Cockney girl is an equally charming person, as her friends maintain, it is not surprising that the real cause of most river-side marriages is love—the cause of all real happiness and sorrow. Love does not end with London Bridge. It dances in many eyes on the south bank as the couples pick their way along the crowded streets, makes tired hearts fresh, and many small minds big. Even the unhappy marriages, where the body has forestalled the heart, begin in some form of love.

Nineteen or twenty is the common age. It is at this time that love begins to predominate, and the comforts of home no longer satisfy. The date is fixed by varying considerations. The youth waits often till his wages touch a certain point, at which he will earn enough for two. The habit of keeping a blind eye to the future prevents him from dividing the weekly sum by four or five. As soon as the determined limit is reached (generally about a pound a week, or even less), the time has come, and the banns are

called. Sadly often the marriage comes earlier than this, in order to save a child from shame, and earn for it the hollow blessing of a legitimate name.

The ceremony of marriage has curiously little emphasis set upon it by custom in these parts. A funeral demands special clothes and carriages, very considerable expense, and to attend such an event second cousins will take a day off work, and think it but dutifully spent. Yet a marriage is, by comparison, almost unnoticed. Among the really poor wedding-presents are almost unknown. It occurs most frequently on Saturday or Sunday, as it is hardly worth while to lose a day's work. Yet few attend it outside a small circle of lady friends. The bride will hire a cape and a hat for half a day, in which a hundred others have blushed and made their vows; the bridegroom may commit himself to a new suit. In a large parish, weddings are so frequent, and occur so much at the same time, that they tend to lose solemnity. At Christmas and Easter boys and girls are married, not in couples, but in batches. The service is cut short, but not made thereby any easier to understand. It is hurried through on both sides, and the chance worshipper in the church would realize with horror that this was the crisis in two lives, and the signal for the birth of many more.

The honeymoon lasts but for a few hours, and is spent inside a public-house near the church. At this festivity the circle of friends is a little wider, and tongues flow more freely. At last a move is made for the new home, where a room has been engaged for three shillings and sixpence, a week's rent having been paid in advance. Under these sordid auspices does the married life open.

The happiness of the first few married years must depend on the measure of love that has brought the two together. If the boy and girl are really fond of one another, the marriage, whether forced or natural, will remain a happy one. The first few years will test the bond severely. The furniture cannot be bought outright, but is purchased on

the hire system, which is often but the ugliest form of usury. The weekly payment will make a sad hole in wages, and it will drag on for more than the first twelve months. Then the children begin to come. The mother finds it difficult to keep her regular work, and for fourteen years the man is the only breadwinner. At the end of that time comes the period of their greatest prosperity, for the children one by one leave school, and add their earnings to the family income. For ten years father and mother are in comparative ease. But this is the summit of working life, and from this point starts the last downward curve. The children now are leaving home, and taking with them the shillings they had contributed, till at last the father and mother reach again the dire poverty from which they started. Poverty makes some mothers and fathers cling the more closely to each other, but with many it is a grave strain upon their affection, giving occasion for complaint and grumble, sharpening the tongue and embittering the temper, so that in the end vice and violence obliterate all love. This economic curve, which begins and ends in poverty, makes a system of early marriage natural, and, indeed, necessary. For if the man and woman did not have their children while they were still young, they would find it difficult to maintain them all the years of their schooldays.

The boy does not give up all his spare time to his wife after marriage. He still frequents his club, and plays his game of billiards or football. It is always doubtful whether clubs for married men are a genuine gain in the social life of the district, for the husband who has been away at work all day might well spend the evening with the wife, who has herself just come back from her work at the jam factory. Of all the thousand couples strolling along the Old Kent Road on Saturday night not more than ten or twenty will be married It is, unhappily, not common for husband and wife to be seen walking out together in the evening, as they did but a year before, in the days of courtship. A wedding seems to end all nudging and giggling. The arrival of the

first baby is a signal for a return to something like the old spontaneous affection, and the three may occasionally be seen together, paying triumphant visits on Sunday afternoon to a childless aunt at Hackney or Hammersmith. Children are indeed the great reminder of the marriage bond, and when all love for the woman seems dead and out of mind, many an impulse will be restrained and many a sacrifice made "just for the sake of the children."

After two or three years love has a yet harder struggle. The woman has grown middle-aged very quickly, and has lost attraction. Her hair is dishevelled all day long; she is shapeless and uncomely. Her voice seems to have nothing between a piercing nasal shriek of anger and the thick rapid tones of one in drink. The man begins to harden and coarsen, smiling less frequently, more sparing of words Their home grows more and more impossible as a comfortable resting-place when the children begin to multiply.

Poverty, ugliness, and hard work are a hard strain on the marriage bond, and often it breaks somewhere, and husband and wife are again "two folk," as they say in the North. When the home is so small and crowded, division comes more quickly. In other places the incompatible may lessen the risk of an actual quarrel by seeing little of one another; but by the river-side the resources of a two-roomed tenement do not allow that convenient absence which makes the heart grow fonder. The man cannot escape his wife's nagging voice, and she has no relief from his vile, drunken habits. Great wretchedness ensues; all week long flows the stream of peevish and surly recrimination, swollen on Saturday by drink to the point of violence. In such a home continuance of the marriage brings pain to the woman, misery to the man, while the children grow old and cunning before they can read or write.

Yet, even so, there is an instinctive dislike for the separation allowed by law, and for every case that comes before the magistrate there must be three or four ill-matched couples who prefer to struggle along under the same roof

or to separate of their own accord. If the opportunities for actual divorce were brought within the reach of the working man, it seems probable that there would be the same disinclination to take advantage of them. Where separation does ensue at present the woman, as a rule, finds it possible to keep her children by her own earnings, but the man wanders off, sends no money to her for maintenance, and finds it difficult to remain faithful to his marriage vows. It seems, therefore, likely that the liberty of divorce would be more appreciated by the man than the woman.

At the heart of our trouble lies a low material view of marriage. The clergy could do much to make the wedding a more solemn time ; a crusade of married women might do more. The ideal of marriage will rise slowly by infinite work among individuals. There should be more open and direct teaching about it in the boys' clubs and girl's clubs. It should neither be shunned nor merely treated as a joke in ordinary conversation. The standard will rise not so much by ecclesiastical pronouncement or legal rigidity, but by the labours and works of men and women who have in their own lives learnt and shown something of the fulness of human love.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE WORKING MAN

Occupations of manhood vary infinitely, and so produce very different types of labourer. Work by the river-side is of such a kind as to make men heavy and dull, for it is mostly unskilled labour, asking only for strong, enduring bodies.

When school, games, and marriage are well behind him, the ordinary workman by the water's edge slips into his groove, and will be likely to stay there till the end of his days. Occasions for romance and excitement have passed ; there will be little to stir his sluggish pulse for his remaining forty years. The bulk of his life will be confined within dull

and narrow limits. These cramping features consist in much hard work, in which thought or interest are not asked or wanted ; a settled wage, with no room for ambition ; a struggling home, which any chance mishap will plunge into acute poverty. The rigid time-table of each day's work, the colourless routine, and the shabbiness of things about him will in a few years stifle his boyish longings for all the best things in life.

A simple old gentleman walked slowly once along a road, stopping a man now and then on his way to work. Each time he put the same odd question : " Kiss your wife before you left this morning ?" The men were startled, and then, with the usual charity for the foibles of age, they would break into a grin and come as near a blush as a working man of forty can hope to come. But the answer in each case was curiously identical : " Oh no, sir ; we gave that sort of thing up a long time ago." Five out of six replies were verbally the same, and the sixth man was unmarried. Such statistics are of more value than many chest measurements or baby weights. For they reveal the inwardness of life across the bridges, and discover there a new form of heart disease which is destructive of happy life.

At thirty a man has given up playing games, making love to his wife, reading books, or building castles in the air. He is dangerously contented with his daily work. Early rising no longer vexes his sleepy soul, for it is an instinct now to roll out of bed and light the gas ; he no longer shivers as he turns into the dark wet street. Boys turn up their collars, put hands in pockets, and scutter along the streets, not a little aggrieved that the hour is so early and they a little late. But the older man lights a pipe and trudges with heavy feet at a slow, even pace, with no signs of worry or animation in his face, his thoughts inscrutable.

The grind and discomfort of daily life are accepted without grievance or comment as a usual and almost necessary state of affairs. His home is made neither healthy by his landlord nor tidy by his wife. He gets poor value for the

money spent on food and drink. His working clothes are dirty and shapeless, his Sunday ones dreadfully uncomfortable, yet he does not rebel. When at work he stands for ten hours feeding his machine in a hot oily atmosphere, or drives his waggon in the pouring rain, or rolls barrels across the wharf while an August sun pours upon his back. The Socialist orator in the evening reminds him of these obvious facts, exaggerates the hardship and privation, compares the humble packer and his wage to the sleek director of companies, "with good capon lined," dictating smooth letters in the inner office, bright with mahogany and Turkish rugs. The working man stops on his way home to listen to the orator for a few moments at the edge of the crowd. He removes his pipe from his mouth, spits with foresight, and puts it back in the other corner. Then he slides off home, still inscrutable, yet with little thought of revolution in his heart.

For with that strange lack of perspective, which is the result of all hurried and incomplete education, the man does not grumble against his big troubles, but nurses a long and bitter grievance against some petty annoyance or injustice. He was long ago resigned to a very moderate wage, with little chance of increase: the long hours and the monotony of his task do not make him bitter. Indeed, they kill the very spirit which makes revolt thinkable, and deprive him of the time or initiative to stand outside himself and review the conditions of his life. He does not nourish hatred against the unseen landlord or grasping agent who exacts six shillings a week for two cramped and dilapidated rooms. Nor does he cry out to local authorities for better sanitation or big open spaces. He is but a poor, unambitious social reformer. Imagination has died within him; his mind is wooden, and makes no response to the fervid appeal of the orator.

Instead of any such outbursts he indulges in little and peculiar grievances in matters where his safety and welfare are scarcely concerned at all. It may be that someone in authority has said something to him "which he had no cause

to do, with him being what he is, if you take my meaning." Oftener still is he troubled by some change in an old-established custom. It was the habit of "the old gentleman" (*i.e.*, the senior partner) to shake hands on some great day of the year with all the men working at the wharf. His son succeeds him, and raises the wages, but he omits this little ceremony. Many a tongue is set wagging slowly, and many a time it is heard in the yard: "No, what I says is that it ain't the same, not as what it was when the old gentleman was here, and all." The changing of the name of some street, the pulling down of a public-house, will awake resentment in the minds of men who lived half a mile away, but passed them daily on their way to work. Though they may never enter church through the year, yet they will view with little favour the new vicar who departs from old ways.

There is a terrible finality in the career of an unskilled labourer. Ambition soon is crushed, for the future holds, as a rule, no hope or possibility of a high wage or position. Accordingly, the man sighs neither with hope nor regret. He knows neither the pleasant surprises nor the disappointments of promotion. If at the age of twenty-five he is a packer or a drayman at twenty-five shillings a week, he will in all likelihood be earning just as much when he is fifty. There is nothing in his work to make him think about it; he passes no remark upon the incidents of the day when he returns to his wife at night. His task varies so little that any native ingenuity and resource dies of disuse; he is fain to accept the estimation of the industrial world and become a slow machine—a mere pound-in-the-slot automaton, which runs down at the end of the week, and is sometimes a little out of order on Monday morning.

At home there is little to balance this depression of self. The surrender of his individuality to material necessities might be checked by domestic interests. He shows certainly a strange fondess for babies, and often handles them with marvellous dexterity in their awkward midnight

moments. The more prosperous man is often seen in a summer evening, wheeling a perambulator of rather old-fashioned design (as it seems to the bachelor eye) with pride and contentment. The first of the babies is perhaps more favoured by such paternal attentions than the later ones, and few fathers are seen with more than two children at the same time. In this they are wise.

The care of the children is delegated to the mother. It is she who chooses the school, and interviews the teacher, the inspector, or the magistrate. The father is only called in to administer punishment in its more severe forms. As a rule, he is a sterner judge and executioner, but more just, for he does not act in impatience or temper. He seems often to ignore his children, and he certainly takes little part in their education, though when he does make some pronouncement it has the force of absolute decree. The child is brought up to fear the parent he sees so little, and though this passes in the days of independence, the son will not easily come to understand his father. Yet, despite his indifference, every man is the better for his fatherhood. Rough and troublesome patients in hospital can often be only managed by the experienced nurse, who puts a little child in their charge. Responsibility begets self-control.

The care and management of the house is so much in the mother's hands that it is really more her home than his. The man rarely brings in a friend to sit by the fire and chat. Such social delights are tasted elsewhere. The neighbours who do come in are, as a rule, the wife's friends. It is she who entertains and makes the laws of hospitality. In her hands will rest the management of the furniture, the decision of what shall be pawned or redeemed. If a move is to be made, she will choose the new home and superintend the removal on a small cart or coster-barrow. The husband only demands that, as far as possible, his conservatism in small things shall be respected. He would object with some force to the removal of some old photograph that for fifteen years has been perched on a chest of drawers. A

new wall-paper would dismay him, and if he could not find his spare pipe in its usual place there would be grave dissatisfaction. If a stranger calls, he will leave it to his wife to represent the family interests ; and if there is any need for diplomacy, the case will be safer in her hands. For she has the readier tongue and quicker grasp of an advantage. Though still maintaining his headship of the family, and asserting it on occasions with ruthless force, the wife on ordinary days reigns as ruler of the home. As a natural result she has more pride in any good points that it may have, and she is more likely to resent its position in a rough and crowded quarter. The man sees very little of it, and notices still less. He is not ashamed of its state or situation, and exhibits no sense of proprietorship. Should he happen to spend the evening at home, with an interval about 9 p.m. for "a walk round," he will sit by the fireside, strangely silent, often with his hat on but his coat off, making no attempt to talk, and showing no desire to listen. There he will sit with the apathy of a bullock, the model of a home-loving husband. Thus the self of a man, deadened already by the manner of his work, does not often revive and expand in his hours at home. He pursues a policy of animal contentment, and does not allow the ordinary domestic ties and affections to quicken his lethargic soul. By this he robs himself of yet another side of life, which sharpens all the sensations and memories, and enriches the hard days of a really happy man.

In the hours of leisure he is most likely to unbend and show what manner of man he is. For ten hours he hibernates at work each day ; on Sunday he does the same in bed till one o'clock. Yet there is no longer the boyish reaction in the few hours that remain. He does not run along the streets to pleasure any more than he does to work. He never sings—unless he is drunk, and then rather as a melancholy duty. At church he is found silent through the hymns ; the rollicking chorus at the music-hall will be very pleasant, but he will not join with the boys and girls about

him. Affection rarely moves him to be demonstrative, laughter is far less frequent than in old days. Many old saws and sayings fall from his lips, but rarely the pointless quips of youth. At sixteen when, facing a stranger with a growing moustache, he would ejaculate "Woolwich Arsenal and the Spurs," adding, after a minute, by way of explanation, "eleven a side, you know," and then running away. But now his personal observations are heavy and obvious, and when he tells a story it is not racy or flippant, but a long rigmarole, which repeats a tedious conversation that occurred one day when he met a man still less gifted in repartee. It is as intelligent and pointed as the table talk of an average golfer. The witty bus-conductor, so often thought an average Cockney, does not live by the river-side, but farther away, in streets that are almost suburban.

Many hours perhaps in the week are spent in a public-house. The proceeding is very leisurely, for often he will stand outside for half an hour before pushing open the swing-doors. After a couple of glasses, drunk with great deliberation, he will emerge and lean for another thirty minutes against the wall. Only a small minority drink frequently to excess, and they are usually the casual workers from the common lodging-house. The man in regular employment will be merry and perhaps a little quarrelsome on Saturday night, but his nightly dissipation is a very moderate affair. The quieter spirits send out a boy with white chipped jug to the public-house, and drink their pint at home, with little sign of thirst, often spreading their enjoyment over a couple of hours.

Games are too violent for his slow, heavy limb ; but he is still a keen reader, talker, and spectator in such matters. The feverish anxiety for the success of the "Spurs," the eagerness to buy a pink sheet on Saturday night, the immense knowledge of biographical details in the football world has passed from him ; but he still "follows up" his favourite local boxer or wrestler, gazing on him with admiration, carrying about his photograph, accompanying

him with other like-minded supporters to each contest in London. This will lead almost necessarily to a little betting, for the old instincts of twenty years ago are by no means dead. The more adventurous maintain their interest in horse-racing, and lose many a shilling in the hope of gaining ten. There is little gambling over cards, for there is nowhere to play, save, perhaps, in a quiet corner of the warehouse at the dinner-hour. On the whole the speculative instincts of the adult find scope in the activities of other people rather than their own.

Politics stir them very little, even at the time of election. Very many have no vote, because they are always moving ; the majority of the more settled do not attend the party meetings, but profess great indifference. They have but the vaguest notion of the issues before the country, or the meaning of party catchwords. Old scandals sink deep and live for ever ; anything that affects the reputation of the candidate is likely to prove a more potent influence than the gravest flaw in his cause. In argument they fall back on a few well-worn shibboleths, which are so axiomatic as to be beyond examination or dispute, and which they apply with both hands in the clumsiest way imaginable. Morning papers are almost unknown, and the evening ones are only read for the sporting news they offer. The real source of political information and opinion is the Sunday paper, which generally puts the matter very strongly on one side or the other. In the end the elector's mind by the river-side is empty of logic, or reason, or clear fact, and from the muddle of party cries and untrue scandals he plucks a tangled skein which he calls his opinion, and is whirled away in a motor-car by a grateful party, to record his vote for cheap food or expensive ships.

His amusements are rare. He is not a regular attendant at the music-hall, though his admiration for local celebrities will often draw him to a benefit concert. He smokes and drinks with a regularity which gives the appearance of great steadiness, and hides from him the fact that, though

the total amount expended varies not at all from week to week, it is always more than he can afford. Once or twice a year he indulges in the wild pleasures of youth, and goes into the country for his annual " beno." This mysterious word covers two rather different festivities. Each large firm, as a rule, closes for one day in the summer, and proceeds *en masse* for a day in Kent or on the south coast. Senior partner and junior partner, manager, foreman, clerk, warehouseman, and office-boy are all expected to accept the generous invitation, and all save the most timorous and temperate will be there. There is a lunch—a very big lunch—an interval in which each group pursues its own amusement, a second heavy meal, and a late journey home. There are a number of toasts and speeches, much drinking, and great jollity. The other sort of " beno " dates from a public-house in the neighbourhood, which collects subscriptions from its *habitués*, and on some fixed Sunday drives them out to a Kentish village, where there is little to do save drink and play skittles in the good old-fashioned way. They return just before midnight with blazing Chinese lanterns and loud cornets, dashing up in the speedy coaching style to the kindly hostelry that sent them out. They have been drinking all day, but they adjourn for a parting glass to the old familiar counter, while the children of the street swarm over the empty waggonettes, for which they have long waited. It is a sorry exhibition, for the hard worker from the wharf or warehouse deserves a better holiday than this liquorous debauch. On Bank Holidays he will enjoy himself more quietly, for only the few go far afield.

Little provision is made for the reasonable and innocent enjoyment of the adult's spare hours. The parks might by way of experiment become model beer-gardens one bright summer. They would be healthier and more reputable than the average public-house. Drinking would become a modest natural habit, the chance accompaniment of social intercourse, a mere accessory of family life, and not an occupation in itself.

There are in every quarter men who do not fall into this mechanical animalism. Undaunted by the stiffness of an unused mind and the handicap of time, they set their face towards knowledge. They read and think, attend classes at working men's colleges, fiercely dissect the arguments of the demagogue, quote from Spencer and Darwin with a flourish, and become oracles among their fellows. Such men lead temperate and economical lives, dress in dark clothes, and wear badges at all corners of their coats. They may grow cranky and cantankerous, measuring themselves by the unread crowd they have left, rather than by the thoughtful savants, whose names are magic in their ears.

Another small circle, with less mental power, but more spirit and character, are separated out from the ten thousand toilers, and form the church-going population. The standards of dress and conduct are more rigid with them, and their homes reflect the change. They prove loyal to their pledge, and if they have not the finely-tempered spirituality of the saint, they are hewers of wood and drawers of water in the building of the river-side church, and without their staunch adherence and steady lives the Gospel would lack the most striking witness to its truth.

Yet the rank and file have only the reflected influence of the ambitious and the good. They work on in their many thousands, leading a life so incomplete that they are in truth not more than half alive. Their faces betray the materialism of their middle age. The features have thickened, and move slowly as they speak or listen. The mouth is nearly always obscured by a moustache, but if it were free it would be hard and meaningless. Each one is different from another, yet has so little personality. Their virtues are unfailing ; there is a bedrock of solid goodness ; from this issue their acts rather than from impulse or calculation. Few men would beat their wives when sober ; they are kind to all animals, far too sentimental about children, generous to a fault. Sombre and undistinguished in dress, stolid in manner, with an even and monotonous

voice, who would recognize in them the vivacious nuisance of sixteen, who stole the butter on Saturday night at a holiday camp, that his hair might be sleek in church on Sunday? The gaiety of age which leads the crisp little colonels of Mayfair into check trousers and scarlet handkerchiefs finds no counterpart in the shambling old men across the bridges. It is indeed a waste of the long span of life if the fidgety youngster and gay Lothario shall spend his last thirty years in a struggle that lacks heart and purpose, and only makes him a clumsy, imperturbable machine. Even when he has paid the price, losing his individuality and drudging faithfully along, he stands for ever on the precipice of instant poverty. Illness or accident or the tricks of trade depression may bring him to the gate of the workhouse, and disband the family that he loved without romance or demonstration. It is a sorry picture, even when the uglier details are in the shade, and the glow of industry and good nature is allowed to spread all over it; sorrier still when it is remembered that the man who keeps his work and pays his rent is counted a success by the river-side. These slow, heavy-witted men are the steady workers who make trade possible: they are law-abiding citizens, forming public opinion, good parents of many children. If they even figured in statistics, they would be characterized as "doing well"; the police do not know them singly, and on inquiry would report them as honest and respectable working men of blameless character. They are the steady bulk of the community, insuring the peace of the district by their habits and opinions far more effectively than any vigilance of police or government. Yet, if they are indeed satisfactory, how low are the civic standards of England, how fallen the ideals and beauties of Christianity. No man that has dreams can rest content because the English worker has reached this high level of regular work and rare intoxication. Waves of divine discontent must sweep the river-side; men must not throw away the treasures of boyhood, and

smother the spark of life with corduroys. The best of to-day shall be the laggards of to-morrow; for the best may at present reassure our fears, but they cannot satisfy our hopes.

Failures abound in every street. These are men who have not that maximum of work and minimum of character which mark the rank and file. They will drift sooner or later from the settled home, and be found in a common lodging-house, leading a life different from all others, helping to form a class which baffles and alarms the country. Of every ten boys who chased trams and cars along the road, and then grew to love a girl, nine will settle into the steady pace of working men, but the tenth will slip out of the ranks, and those who have a care for him must follow him to some very strange scenes and company.

## CHAPTER XIV

### FAILURES

THERE are many better sleeping places on a misty night than the Embankment benches, and one of them is an old rambling doss-house by the river-side of South-East London. The homeless man would not find it very easily, unless he should see a knot of men in the street leaning against the wall and pillar-box with an air of permanence.

He must leave the muddy road with its desolated horse-trams behind him, plunge bravely down a dark passage, go sideways and bow his head, pull the first wooden door towards him, push the second away, persevere with the passage, and he will arrive. It is a large, oddly-shaped room, lit by a few gas-jets that hang from the ceiling at very jaunty angles, and warmed by a generous fire, which is the sovereign deity of the little state. For does not every man cook his food on a grid before its friendly blaze, which does not distinguish between a bloated herring and a humble onion? Are not thirty teapots of dented tin filled from the giant coppers at its side? And if in the rainy season a man must forswear the foppery of a second

suit or change of handkerchief, he needs but to stand by that fire, dodging the many cooks and scullions, and if he does not melt first, he will soon be dry. It answers the claims of necessity, and comfort, and health, and sociability. And if anyone looks for sentiment in our kitchen, he may guess rightly that, when some of the old faces are in the cosy workhouse, with its warm pipes and tidy bedsteads, or the younger ones away on "active service," making baskets and door-mats at His Majesty's expense, they forget the stupid pictures and discoloured walls of the lodging-house, recalling and longing for the great red fire.

Who are these men to whom the fire ministers? They are the flowers and weeds, the mud and slime that cling to God's embankment, because the river of life is too swift for them. One half the world calls them "poor devils"; the other half, "lazy devils"; but it is always devils—always a half contempt which passes by on the other side.

There is room (as the London County Council counts room) for eighty such in the old tenement. But the visitor will not find more than one-third the number as he comes into the light of the fire on any night at eight o'clock. For some are already in bed upstairs—a quaint dormitory with the scrupulous twenty-three inches of separation between bed and bed, but scarce three seconds between the snores. Some are keeping appointments of different kinds "up the street" or "round the corner," the exact venue being invariably the same. Some are not yet in from the solid triumph of a full day's work, and some have not found work and dare not come.

Each man is in a different attitude. There is a blessed variety of pose in this hotel which the private drawing-room would never sanction, and which the club smoking-room can hardly attain. The adversity of last night has combined with the ill-judged prosperity of this afternoon to make Bill very sleepy, and he lies inert against the wall, his upper limbs huddled, the lower ones stretched out in all their ungainliness, and on his face the semblance of a

child's smile. Half a dozen more sit on a bench, back or head or elbow leaning on the table behind. They gaze without comment at the kipper twirling before the fire, and at the plate which Fatty has so thoughtfully set beneath. Fatty himself shambles to and fro with glad preoccupation, now at the bench cutting his loaf into some half-dozen slices, now at the fire tending to the climax of his day's work. Flashy is pluming himself before the mirror. The gloss of youth is still on his cheek. Another year in haunts such as these, and the firmness and hope of his boy's face may be gone ; angles will begin to show themselves, the mouth run down at the corners, and the eyes grow either furtive or brazen. But to-night he has still some cause for the vanity which leads him to give ten minutes' close attention to his scarf. With vigour and precision he plies the clothes-brush, as though it were an ink-eraser struggling with a blot.

Cocky eats. Nothing else can be predicated of him for the moment. His eye is fixed on those old scraps of meat and bone before him. There is a grim concentration of all bodily senses and mental powers which seem to preclude thought or consciousness of anything else. Yet not so. Next to him sits the wretched Fishy, with the pink shreds of an evening newspaper before him, murmuring over full details of murders, and gloating over stories of rich and pious men who have proved rogues. Dirt and disease have not made him pleasant to look upon, and as for his morals, not even his confederates would trust him with more than the " price of a drink." Fishy is a low, shuffling creature, and he knows it. He chances to raise the paper, and finds that Cocky has pushed a basin of tea towards him. Gripping it in his right hand, with a dingy thumb well inside the rim, he drinks freely, leaving the bottom scarcely covered, and shoves it back. Cocky glances at the result, mutters " I don't think !" with a meaningless complacency, and relapses into a further struggle with his dismembered supper.

In other corners may be seen the Twins disputing over

a cribbage-board where all the pegs are black, or foolish Albert teaching the cat to leap over a bowler hat, or unnoticed Daddy mumbling over his disordered memories of Crimean days.

The door swings to and fro as men come in and out; the gas makes nervous obeisance to the draught. The succession of petty activities proceeds, and the great fire grows redder and hotter all the while.

It is, perhaps, well to glance at the forces which rule this strange brotherhood. A short, stumpy man, with an ill-favoured moustache, and for present purposes the name of Henry—this is "the guv'nor," sole proprietor of the river-side hotel. The penurious habits of an old uncle, who lived poorly that he might die rich ten years ago, enabled the nephew, who was in the greengrocery line, to take the old building on lease, and seek easier profits, though his, indeed, was a nature more suited to guide the destinies of cabbages than of men. A nervous affectation of heartiness in his greeting each time that he "just pops in to see you're all right," and a quick flush when he suspects ridicule or contradiction, suggest that the crown rests uneasily on his brow. And his kingship is, indeed, no sinecure. He finds himself responsible to the authorities for the clean and careful housing of eighty tired men, from each of whom he must exact some two shillings and elevenpence a week. He must face inspectors at any moment, and defend his realization of their ideals of hygiene and sanitation. Nor is this easy, when standards differ, and men spit with such facility. Often enough he is the buffer between detective and lodger, forced to own that he does know the baptismal names of Pat and Fishy, and yet fearing to drop a hint of their whereabouts. For prudence demands that he should win both the confidence of the lodgers and the good favour of the authorities. Should either suspect an intrigue with the other party, Henry may be forced to return to his cabbages in the Walworth Road. But the blood of neither the Cecils nor

the Churchills flows in his veins. He is too self-conscious for diplomacy, and bluff is no game for a timid man.

A strong, straight man, whose tact was common-sense honesty, and whose tool was his own personality, might spread much goodness and stability into the little ground-floor back. A rigid adherence to the rules of payment, and a sterner insistence on decent language and clean habits as due to the community and the place, would be a good beginning. For Henry is sometimes lenient over the nightly fivepence, and it is not always clear that his motive is pity rather than fear, or, indeed, that pity would be in season ; and should he chance to appear at a moment of turmoil, his mild protest—"Better language, please !"—seems to strike a note that is little more than interrogative. Yet to a very large degree the place might take its tone from the personality of the owner. The permanence and authority of his position give him an intangible power, which may stimulate the good or thwart the evil habits of this common life. He might say little, never preach, and only advise when asked ; always be remembered as "the guv'nor," yet spend his spare hours with the men over cribbage, or dominoes, or nap. The reformer would do well to bear in mind that the licensed proprietor is as potent a factor for good or evil as the foreman in a warehouse or a don at a college. It might be possible to scrutinize the character of any applicant for such a licence as carefully as is done in the case of a publican. The issue is far weightier ; for, though the lodging-house keeper touches a smaller circle, his influence strikes far deeper, and his supervision is more constant. Under the prevailing system, a man of weak calibre, or, indeed, of notoriously loose character, may be licensed to act landlord ; and the house will open its doors to the professional gambler and all those who traffic in men's weakness.

The second level of internal government is reached when the lodger first meets "the deputy," whom modern history chooses to disguise as 'Elf. His title is the same in all

lodging-houses, and it hits the true pathetic note. For 'Elf must always be an understudy to Henry, commissioned to mind the place when old friends in Walworth are to be revisited. His authority is second-hand, and may be revoked by any whim or impulse of his chief. The duty of collecting "kip-money" generally falls to him. Throughout the evening the black note-book with the limp elastic is in and out of his pocket, and stiff grimy fingers record by ticks and crosses the lot of each man—for a stroke means a six-foot bed upstairs, with sheets and a pillow, but a cross points him to the door. All this in the middle of many odd jobs. For Fatty and Bill may fetch and cook their supper, but it is for the "deputy" to clear away the plates. His washing-up is made easier by their habit of running the last crust round the plate before supper is counted at an end. The fire must be made up each hour from that odd assemblage in the bucket to which all nature contributes; the copper must be filled with water from the tap in the yard; Flashy is crying out for soap with some impatience; Daddy wants a "bit of something" to wrap round his bad leg; and others are clamouring for the dominoes. With their few pence the lodgers have bought the right to command 'Elf, and freely use this last privilege of independent gentlemen. In so far as he is willing in his service, genial to the sober, and deferential to the drunk, 'Elf is teaching the primary laws of social goodness and happiness; and the kitchen suffers when the infirmary claims him for a month. Payment takes the form of the oldest bed in the darkest corner, some food, and a couple of shillings a week; for no man is expected to assess the moral value of a servant in determining his wage. 'Elf was appointed to his duty when he had fallen out of the ranks at the wharves through old age and rheumatism. As an old *habitué* of the place, he knew its ways, and his standard of honesty was just so much above that of the other lodgers as to inspire some confidence without suggesting anything snobbish or exotic. There are so many

masters to serve, and his position midway between Henry and the lodgers is at times so delicate, that the function of " deputy " is not exercised by any one man for very long. It is to be regretted that the " deputy " has not a more clearly-defined authority and a greater security of tenure.

The third phase of internal government is the least tangible of all. Eighty men cannot gather together for food and shelter in any place without creating some form of community-sense in each individual. Behind the vacillating authority of Henry and 'Elf there must be stirring a public opinion, the least common measure of sentiment and tradition. As a guide and regulator of conduct, its operations may be fitful and obscure, but no one can deny its existence. A rough analysis of its sources and a survey of its effect is all that observation can achieve. The circumstances of place and time contribute in some measure to the prevailing tone. For though men come and go, passing from here to prison or infirmary, or hop-field or labour colony, and returning with little comment on either side, there is a definite *clientèle*. A complete stranger is rare ; an old *habitué* (Daddy has been here intermittently for sixteen years) is always here or hereabouts. Furthermore, no man is very good, and none are anything but poor. The result is a tendency to fellowship and forgiveness, though grudges are possible and fights not unknown. Yet there is a oneness, and it is the spring of much charity. In the second place, there is a " blood set," as in most communities Patsy and Flashy are among the leaders. They are lusty men, younger, as a rule, who still find consolation in a bright scarf ; a trifle arrogant, contemptuous of those they fear, speaking in louder tones than the other lodgers, singing or humming when they will, but discountenancing the habit in Fishy or Nobbler. These gay fellows set the pace, and from them we get our rules and manners. For it is, indeed, in small matters rather than in great that public opinion speaks out boldly. As a third constituent, the moral fog in the street has drifted in

through the low door. Hurried and incomplete education, *laissez-faire* at home, and shambling poverty for many years have tinged judgments here as they have outside. Cheap papers and superficial minds have acted and reacted on each other, and at the end our community is puzzled and baffled by great questions of public interest, or by unexpected events. So it is accustomed to seize on one aspect of the matter, and, having chosen a fitting formula, to close the discussion by repeating the aphorism many times, patching the threadbare parts with one or two unvarying adjectives.

Save when the actual money is demanded, the internal government is almost invisible, and several years might pass before its form was detected. When dragged to light, it does not amount to so very much. Yet it is wise to remember that the safest reform starts from within, and that what government obtains already might well be strengthened. A good centurion must be found, who will give his deputy a more official position, and encourage the expression of the common will. For there is a oneness underneath.

If there is little sign of self-government within the common lodging-house, there is an abundance of external authorities, seeking by coercion and restraint to govern the lives of the human failures, so that they may not become dangerous or disagreeable to the more successful.

The corduroys of the workhouse, the khaki of the prison, and the red flannel of the Poor Law infirmary, are all familiar uniforms to shapeless Bill and unhealthy Nobbler. It is a strange itinerary that they have pursued for thirty years—tasting the cold comfort of every kind of Government institution, and a good number of philanthropic ones, learning to answer glibly the same circle of questions, well versed in the fallibility of officials. The lodging-house is a place in close contact with every branch of State activity. At each phase of his life the loafer is in the hands of some authority, penal or friendly, and those who follow

his career will gain a varied experience of local government and organized charity.

By a General Powers Act of 1902, the London County Council obtained the sole right to issue licences to anyone wishing to keep a common lodging-house. Inquiries have to be made as to the suitability of the premises and the character of the applicant. Any licence so granted remains in force only for a year, and renewal may be refused on any grounds, though an appeal will lie to a metropolitan police magistrate. A further Act extends the power of the Council in a most vital direction by requiring that the appointment of a "deputy" must be approved in writing by the Council.

The character and habits of the lodgers render necessary a long list of stringent by-laws, which Henry is required to hang in his room, to study and to observe; for the coming and going of stray men favours the chance of any epidemic disease, and where tastes are not exacting, and habits are lax, law must raise her voice the more stridently for health and decency.

The attitude of the Council must be very largely a preventive one, and its by-laws are not content to keep the lodgers in a moderate state of health and comfort, but try to protect the district from the dangers threatened by the existence of a common lodging-house in its midst. Upstairs in the dormitory may lie one day a sad wanderer strangely ill. The loathsome signs of smallpox presently appear. How easy for the infection to be carried hither and thither by other lodgers, who between them may sleep in a score of different places within the next week! It is to thwart these and similar dangers that by-laws are framed, and though Henry may groan beneath their number and precision, it is undoubtedly true that each epidemic is restricted to a narrower circle than the one before. Bill and Fishy complain that the kitchen is not so "cosy" as once it was, but that only means it is a good deal cleaner.

To check the observance of such by-laws, and to provide the evidence for the renewal or refusal of licences, there exists a staff of special inspectors, who may visit at any hour of the day or night.

There still remain points for further observation and reform. Some lodging-houses, established by religious agencies, are exempt from inspection, because the method of payment adopted is not covered by the terms of any Act. But it is highly desirable that they should be required to conform to the same standards as are set before Henry and 'Elf.

No by-laws and no inspectors can effect a large measure of positive good. The most they can do is to protect and to prevent. If it were possible to *select* the "guv'nor" for his personality, rather than allow him a licence because there is nothing against his character, it would be otherwise. But so long as the lodging-house is a private venture, the law can take no cognizance of personality, but only demand a negative morality, and a cleanliness that gives safety to those within and to those without its walls.

The Poor-Law officials turn the same weary eye upon the doss-house. They must accept Bill now and then for a time either at the infirmary, or the casual ward, or the workhouse. Out he goes and back he comes ; in his better moments the porter is pleased to be facetious at his re-appearance. The report of the Poor Law Commission is eloquent in its condemnation of the present methods for dealing with these men. It will suffice here to say that "the casual ward" is a fit title for the place, and the other departments might well be renamed "the haphazard house" and "the indeterminate infirmary." This absence of any system of classification in these sad assemblies, this pessimism which colours the whole routine of Poor-Law administration, has served to keep under many a young fellow who has just fallen for the first time from the level of independence. He learns from the veteran to cringe

to the lowest official, to evade the rules, and to degrade himself in his own estimation.

The hatred of the Poor Law and its provisions is a bitter instinct among the men. Fishy will describe with minutest detail the method by which dying men are discharged from the infirmary. (As a rule, any detailed story may be discredited, for the details have come from the telling and retelling of the story, and not from any exactness of memory.) It would, however, appear to be true that in some infirmaries the doctor on his rounds does not ask each man how he feels, but, in order to avoid the risk of many conversations, consults only the nurse. It rests with her to describe the state of the patient, and on her verdict may depend his immediate discharge as temporarily cured. The men allege that if they are able to do the hard work of the ward—scrubbing and cleaning, and making the beds—the nurse purposely gives a slightly unfavourable report of their condition, and they are allowed to stay another week. But should a man be lazy or too tired to work, the nurse will say cheerfully that he "is all right again now," and the man is given his discharge. It is impossible to say how much truth there may be behind these allegations, for the evidence of these men is often the expression of petty spite. But the matter may justify investigation.

To the Distress Committee, and similar agencies for the unemployed, the men of the lodging-house are outcasts. No man who gives a lodging-house as his address will be allowed to enter his name upon the register of unemployed persons. It is found to be a convenient maxim that a man living in such a place is not one of the genuine and more recent unemployed, but belongs to the chronic class of loafer and wastrel; and since it is more urgent to find work for the former to prevent them sinking to the level of the latter, it is idle to cumber the lists with the name of the "dosser." In a vast majority of cases this rough test is valid enough, but here and there it operates unjustly.

Albert has lived here for sixteen years, working two or three days a week at his semi-skilled trade of packing slates. He is very hurt at his summary rejection. "Born and bred as you might say in the parish, and married twice at the old church, and all. Distress Committee, you call it ; Distrust Committee, I say."

To the police they are for ever suspect. No man will be allowed out on bail if his address should prove to be a lodging-house. With some members of the force relations are genial enough, but this is the happy hunting-ground for perplexed detectives. And the general suspicion with which they view a lodging-house is undoubtedly justified by their experience. Here and there a sergeant is popular, but it is more usual to hear wild tales of police conspiracy, oppression, and corruption. There is much jubilation when one man reads aloud from the Sunday paper of some constable in a remote part of the country who has been fined five shillings and costs.

The hand of the failure is against every man's ; he is outcast and suspect. The hospital alone escapes condemnation. The unanimous verdict is that "lodgers are treated there the same as other men." Never a murmur of scandal or blame, nothing but stories of kindness, on which the memory lingers quite as long as it broods over grievances against all other institutions.

## CHAPTER XV

### FAILURES (*continued*)

THE idleness of the failure is not complete. He has spasms of work, and these are, as a rule, the measure of his worth. Yet it is in reviewing the chances of work that hope seems almost to fade away. Does the river beneath the windows cast a spell upon the men within? The poet thinks it murky and deep, filled with the romance of a world-wide commerce; the sightseer on the bridge observes that it is very big and very muddy, and perhaps recalls the dead and shapeless bodies for which Lizzie Hexham and her father searched; but the "dosser" is only conscious of it as a place where boats and barges may come to-morrow and unload their beet, or grain, or timber, where he may get work, or where, more likely, he may find that he is not wanted. Yet it may well be that the river has imperceptibly soaked into his life, that the uncertainties of wind, and tide, and fog have bred in him the haphazard nature that comes from life on the water, and leaves little food in the larder or money in the purse for an unseen to-morrow. And there is a deeper mark than this. The sea may bring restless habits, but the river stupefies a man, making him drowsy with false content.

For they are almost entirely the river-side crowd, the shuffling figures that throng the wharves each early morning. By one route or another they have come to be casual labourers: with some it is a destiny inherited (with little else) from river-side fathers, but many have been cast out on the river-bank by an economic tide from the land. They do not belong to the upper class of river-side labourer,

who is regularly attached to some factory or wharf, and earns his thirty shillings a week throughout the year. Such a one has a house, and wife, and family, a piano, a grey jersey, and a trade union. But it is not so with the lodger. They form the immense surplus of river-side labour. At one wharf they may be known to the foreman (every man has a brother-in-law who is better off than himself), and when extra hands are needed they may rely upon a day's work. But boats do not come in every day (" The Port of London ain't like what it was !") ; and when they do, men are sometimes a little late, owing to " a bit of business " ; while here and there a much-abused junior partner inclines to the belief that a suction-pump unloads his grain more cheaply and speedily than a train of men proceeding down a plank with a sack across the neck. And the men are not all very efficient. Daddy will describe himself in the next census as a " water-side labourer," should this grisly parasite of sixty-five live for another month. In truth, he can only hobble from quay to quay, holding a rope or " mindin' a barrer," his cap and scarf awry, his feet bursting through discoloured boots.

Through these and other causes it comes about that two days' work in a week, bringing in some ten or twelve shillings, is a fair average throughout the year for even a well-grown and able-bodied man. This sounds a tolerable position for a bachelor of quiet habits, but it is a mere statistical abstraction. In reality a man earns twenty-eight shillings one week, and nothing at all in the ensuing fortnight. Work, like the weather, is of all sorts, cannot be foreseen, and is the last refuge of the conversationalist. The unloading of a barge is a protracted and laborious task for muscle and sinew that is fed on tea, and fish, and beer. It may begin soon after midnight, and be carried on until late in the next evening, varied only by a torrent of rain or some hours of keen frost. The work is by no means unskilled. The packing of slates on a boat or a cart is just

as much an art as the fixing of them on a roof. Albert is an expert in the matter, and is never idle so long as the slate-boat is in the river. "But the trade ain't nothing like what it was—nothing like." Each night the same dirge goes round the kitchen, the cry of men who are not wanted. For all river-side work strength and endurance alone are asked; character is no asset in the casual market. On his sober days Bill is as much in demand as any man, for his drink and immorality are irrelevant. Figures indeed might even prove that those who drank most heavily obtained the most work. The truth, of course, lies in the converse of this cynical judgment.

A thirsty nature, however, demands other sources of revenue, and when the river is "quiet," recourse must be had to the innumerable means of livelihood which are furnished by any public thoroughfare. The costers in the roads come for the most part from beyond the river, and a shilling a day may be earned by pushing the barrow over the bridge in the morning and trundling it back again at night. Pat is employed now and again by the coffee-stall proprietor at the corner to act as unofficial policeman and prevent "the boys" from becoming too frisky at the approach of dawn. Others fill the gap by begging and borrowing, holding a horse's head, or dogging the steps of some commercial traveller who looks too successful to carry his own samples from the cab to the shop-door. Fishy never goes down to the river at all, but relies entirely on street-hawking. An old conviction has robbed him of his licence, so he can only sell perishable goods. In the winter months such goods are so perishable as not to be worth selling. Accordingly he takes the risk of dealing in cheap jewellery, which is perishable enough in all truth, but the law has no imagination. He dodges the police with varying success, being fined five shillings about once a month. But some magistrates will not convict so old a friend. Such a trade yields a fair profit, for brooches are cheap enough in Houndsditch, yet highly valued by young

ladies of Camberwell as symbols of an equally perishable affection. So Fishy jogs pleasantly along from week to week, generally well furnished with stock, which the exigencies of time and place compel him to carry on his person. Weedy and helpless he looks in his sloppy frock-coat, born for some bygone wedding in other parts; yet when pride or drink overcomes his caution he will draw from the cavernous recesses of his pocket two dozen of brooches and of rings and other unnamed enormities, which men and women would never buy save as gifts to one another. He sleeps at night among his rubies and sapphires; for he interprets the Golden Rule as bidding him to do to others what he expects they would do to him; and such a code makes men very cautious of one another. To Fishy and others of his kind a crowd spells prosperity, and indeed such occasions of national rejoicing as the first Wednesday in June are so suggestive to both pleasure and business that the doss-house is emptied of nearly all its lodgers—hawkers and river-side labourers alike.

The action of the Distress Committee has left to them only one municipal activity. They may not trim the hedgerows of some snug asylum or dally with the primroses in the park; new roads and bridges must be made by firmer and more honest hands. It is only the blessed uncertainty of English weather that can force the local council to rely on casual and discredited labour.

At two o'clock on a January morning the thick black line of men will begin to form in the back street behind the town-hall. They stand in couples, as submissive as any theatre queue, while the snow falls with just that silent and pitiless accumulation that makes all men a little afraid of the winter. For five hours the line grows and the snow falls. Feet in long gaping boots have long been dead to all feeling, the snow is an inch deep on each round shoulder, bodies are so tired that they can hardly shiver. At half-past seven, when there are fifteen hundred men in line, the doors of the yard are opened, and the first thousand

are engaged to sweep the snow. The odd five hundred turn away with a curse, the elect begin with as hearty a curse to work for ten hours at fivepence an hour. They will not be paid till half-past five that afternoon, so that the dinner-hour is merely an occasion when twopence may or may not be borrowed for a glass of beer. In the afternoon some men fall out, and the others grow listless in their work. Sodden, aching feet are with difficulty dragged from one side of the street to the other, and shovels scrape half-heartedly under the frozen snow. Mr. Buggins, of Streatham, as he passes by, comments with some relish on this, and declares that night to his good wife that " even if you give these unemployed fellows a good job they won't do it "; and Mrs. Buggins counters with a similar anecdote about her charwoman's husband. The moral enthusiasm of Mr. and Mrs. Buggins leads to a consideration of the attitude of these men to work and their fitness for anything better than they already enjoy. What do they think of this weary catalogue of chances ? Are these few and infrequent opportunities indeed the measure of their worth ?

Their attitude once again is very largely negative. They do not naturally care, or think, or talk about what work they find to do. The interest of their lives, the material for their thought or conversation, comes from the halfpenny evening paper, from the gossip at the corner, and the moving pictures at the music-hall. The rolling of a barrel or the semi-circular motion of a packing-case on alternate corners does not fire the imagination. Costering may appeal to the speculative instinct, but, as a rule, work is a blank impersonal necessity, neither hateful nor acceptable, not the subject for comment or reflection.

When they first slipped into the lodging-house, it was but to be for a few weeks till they found regular work. But now it is doubtful whether the same prospect has power to stir their cold-blooded content. They are not satisfied, but they are not always struggling. A weekly wage means private lodgings and Sunday clothes, with

little anxiety or hunger. But it seems a long way off, after ten years of a casual's life, and in the meanwhile there is rough comfort and camaraderie in the old place, by the light of the great red fire. So fifteen or twenty years pass away, and then the infirmary, and perhaps a nameless grave. Men drift so easily to these quicksands, and few escape when once engulfed. They find little spur to work, and no interest in its performance ; neither the work itself nor the wages it may bring seem able to constrain the will.

It may still be considered whether, after ambition has been stirred, the men are by character or physique fitted for the life of an ordinary artisan. Cancer is always among them in its most hideous forms : 20 per cent. of the men show traces of phthisis ; rheumatism and dyspepsia are inseparable from the manner of their lives; incurable and infamous diseases check the vitality of any men who have served in the army. Here and there sight is failing, a finger or so missing, a leg crippled with ulcers. And the strongest will usually succumb to a sudden attack of pneumonia or typhoid. Thus, out of the little regiment of eighty some thirty remain whose bodies can endure both work and weather.

But with them a more subtle malady has wrought havoc in these irregular years. Patches of industry with great gaps of idleness have sapped the moral calibre and bred a craving for change. Some are utterly incapable of working for four continuous hours. They must take a stroll round the corner, and have "a spit and a draw" with a pal. Many can do a hard day's work, but fail to be regular or punctual at the end of a week or a month. They cannot justly be blamed, for they are in the grip of a moral consumption, alternating between fever and debility. The secret of a steady normal life is gone from them. Creatures of chance, they now can serve no other master.

Where shall the observer look for religious creeds or moral standards in this strange disorder ? Such considerations seem more unreal and abstract than ever in this company. And at the end he may perhaps find no trace, and

so grow cynical. One truth may be ventured at the very outset. Morals and religion are not separated so sharply here as in some other classes. The religious man is expected to be so highly moral that an occasional tendency to be sanctimonious is not remarkable. If Pat were to go to Mass on Sunday, and pray each night by his bed upstairs, he would be expected to quit gambling, and drink, and a certain evil humour ; and such abstention would cause no surprise, for religion is recognized by a very strict negative morality. Its positive side is far less vital, being sadly limited to the wearing of certain clothes and collars, and attendance at church or chapel. A high moral standard without profession of religion is equally inconceivable to the lodgers. The abstainer and the prude are without hesitation written down as religious men. For this reason the rich man is always assumed to be religious, for, as a rule, he is not seen drunk. This necessary association of a high moral standard with a religious profession may in part account for the refusal to adopt either. The attitude is a polite *non possumus*. The lodgers form an oasis, acutely conscious of their isolation. The churches are not for them ; the street preacher will not be allowed within the doors. There is such a thing as religion, and with it goes a clean, disciplined life. These are good things, and make men more steady and independent, but they are for men with regular work and settled homes. Doss-house men are apart, outside the scheme. Nothing much is expected of them by police or public ; their futility is taken to be proved by their presence in the kitchen. There may be a few confirmed hypocrites, who are the camp followers of religion, and fawn on every new curate, but the prevailing tone is one of isolation and indifference.

When the stimulus and co-operation which a church or chapel supplies is thus absent, each man is left to the dictates of his own impulse or of his own character. There are few resolute purposes here, swaying a man's actions, bracing him against difficulty and temptation.

It is unusual to find a man whose mind is dominated by one uninterrupted intention throughout a whole week. There is, then, no settled character. They are essentially slaves of the hour. Mood succeeds mood, and to each they respond in their actions, thus making for themselves a very inconsistent record. Of self-control there is little, tempers rise and fall. Pat has been convicted of twenty crimes, in each case the victim of an impulse. This lack of purpose is matched by an inability to look ahead and gauge the future ; the kip-money is earned from day to day, the chances of next winter are beyond the veil. This moral and economic drift are the features of the lodging-house, where life is an aggregate of moments.

This verdict seems to have banished all religion and morality from the place ; but that were a silly thing to do, when eighty men are living there. With no one of them, perhaps, does the Gospel form the framework of their life, since they know no framework whatsoever. They have not yet found religion to be a guide to conduct, or a power to struggle for good against bad. Prayer is not a fact, because God is not near ; the Bible and the Prayer-Book speak of distant things. But there does beat within every man some slow response to the call of his Creator. Few would openly deny the existence of a God, none would maintain that denial to themselves. In addition to this, there is a very real apprehension of another world, though details are commonly ignored. The most striking symptom of their belief that, after all, there is something in religion, lies in their ultimate concession that the religious man is better than the careless, and has something which cannot be obtained elsewhere.

Just as they are not pagan, so they are not entirely non-moral. There is no code or standard imposed on one another, but social virtues are evident on every night of the week. Should a pound of shag be set on the table on Christmas Eve, on the understanding that all must share, it will not disappear into pocket or locker. Sixty pipes

will dip and dip again, the mountain will become a mole-hill, but at the end of three days some will still be there. They may steal each other's goods, but the common property is moderately secure. Any injury to the kitchen cat or her family would be forcibly resented, for rough kindness to animals is natural, and cruelty quite abnormal. In their judgment of others, the tone is one of extreme and sometimes almost reprehensible mercy to the wrong-doer. Far more wonderful than this forgiveness is the power to forget. Fights occur sometimes, and often hard, half-murderous blows, but a week after comes a complete resumption of the old familiarity. These virtues, with the give-and-take generosity in food and money which is so entirely instinctive, combine with the religious intuitions, which are the inheritance of every man, to make a foundation. It is on such natural goodness that the labour colonies have been able to build such results as they have here and there obtained. And for those who consider what can be done for such men by moral and religious agencies, these foregoing assumptions are the grounds of hope.

The root of the trouble may be in part economic, but even in the sociological complexity of the doss-house, religion should play her part. She must not spend her entire strength in shouting at the cause or bewailing the result; but, taking men that are broken by circumstance and sapped by their own weakness, she must still do her work of reclamation. It is a task of infinite difficulty. The Gospel seems weak, if it does not carry bread to the starving and a lodging to the homeless. Yet the one condition of any religious effort in the doss-house is the complete abandonment of the usual policy, and an invariable refusal on the part of a discreet parish clergyman to give any form of material relief. It is only by such a detachment as this that the spiritual force will be discerned by hungry men. But where is this preaching of an empty-handed gospel to strike their ears? Not in the house itself, save at the suggestion of the lodgers; not in the church, for

lodgers do not go there often from pure motives ; but surely at the street corner just outside, where they stand and spit and mutter in their own most natural way. These, then, are the only hints to the Church of this day—no relief funds, but a service in the street outside.

They seem feeble expedients for such a campaign, and they will indeed never be enough. Such men as these are only led to believe by the example of a more complete devotion. The old story is true to-day. Such hearts are only won by the washing of feet and binding of cut fingers, when done by men as poor as they, living in their midst strict lives of unobtrusive service. Some day a body of men may rise out of the Church, and live like wandering friars in places such as this. They will surrender without a sign much that they had rightly valued, pass singly or together from one place to another, working and eating as each day may dispose, sharing all things. They will preach only a little, but when a few men come together, they will read some verses and ask questions. With the same quietness they will help and tend the sick, showing these to be the ordinary actions of life. When men see such Christianity before their eyes, they will believe, and the appeal of religion will strike home. The Bible will no longer speak of distant things.

Till then morality will be chaotic, and religion vague. Men will come and go each night. Flashy must pass from the coxcomb to the criminal, and grow a greater nuisance. Bill must die behind a flimsy screen in the workhouse, and be buried one afternoon when the chaplain is not too busy. In the long ward of a prison hospital Pat will watch the mists gather for the last time across unending moorland. Others will fall in the street, and earn at last the publicity of a crowd, and ambulance, and inquest ; or perhaps be found one morning with stiff and purposeless face on an Embankment bench. Yet they all once crept "with shining morning face unwillingly to school."

## CHAPTER XVI

### CONCLUSION

It might well be supposed that so long a catalogue of hardships and shortcomings could have no very hopeful conclusion. The foregoing chapters have but sketched the sequence of river-side life, and few suggestions of remedy have given to their pages the colour of hope. For they reflect a comparatively brief experience, which is not justified in outlining anything more than the spirit of reform. The child has been born into a world of untidy and unprosperous streets. His parents have endowed him with no abundance of health or skill. The early years were spent in stuffy rooms. Food, clothes, and pleasures proved to be cheap and gaudy, and short-lived. School-years gave great happiness, yet left much in him undiscovered. Work came full early and oppressed his boyhood. There were relaxations, bursts of freedom, mistakes and times of trouble. Undaunted by a rather featureless prospect, he married, and became the head of yet another struggling home. Then he settled to the sober round of a middle-aged workman, or crumbled away into a dissolute loafer, content with the occupations and comforts provided by the life of a lodging-house *habitué*. Strong or weak, foreman or wastrel, he will be the father of others, who must make this journey or fall at the very start.

Many million lives are hemmed within these narrow limits, and their promise perishes as a cramping manhood absorbs the fulness of youth. Each "happy new year," ushered in by much jollity, and overcrowded watch-night services at every church, is appallingly the same. There is much happiness in each, but not enough newness to give spring and force to the life of the worker. The very extent and oppression of the prevailing poverty is so unmeaningly great that men in other parts are always in danger of accepting it as an unalterable fact, mercifully distant from their own experience. Yet when numbers are so large,

and areas so extensive, the practical mind is forced to consider the huge aggregate of life and ability that is lost each year to a country that needs both. The purely material aspect must awake every Englishman to a sense of his share and interest in this state of things. No bank or company can allow assets to lie fallow, its property undeveloped. No country that has joined the struggle for supremacy can allow the finest human material to grow stiff or die for lack of help and understanding. Every boy and girl must grow to their best and fullest, for in the end the greatest country is not she whose work-people are the strongest animals, or the most reliable machines, but rather she whose work-people are the best men and women in the world.

The first impression on the practical man is one of gigantic waste. The actual loss of life is sufficiently appalling to compel the notice of every patriot. Immorality grows unchecked, and brings its penalty upon innocent and guilty alike. The pavements of London are strewn with the wrecks of womanhood, and little children pay the wages of their mother's sins. Idiot girls are allowed to become an easy prey to the more callous of men, and retreat to the workhouse each year to bring forth unwanted children tainted with the mother's taint. Many another child, born in honest wedlock, dies in a home which is not fit for family life, but which the owner has never seen ; or dies because his mother works when she should not, and the employer remains in ignorance of his guilt. The children that die in a single London borough in their first twelve months would be enough, if they lived, to form a regiment, or man a ship, or fill a factory each year. Some would grow to be men of ability, many prove good fathers of another generation. But they are all obliterated by the hardness of poor life, and the harvest of their strength and talents is never reaped. Thus does a country lose more than she can count or know.

The physical waste among those who survive is a further loss, and a far greater expense to the State. The defective offspring of parents, whose union should never have

been allowed, lack from the first some of the parts or senses of life, and will soon lapse into the cold embrace of Government institutions, enduring forty years of well-organized apathy in the nearest workhouse or asylum. The normal child who reaches an ordinary manhood will miss the full perfection of his physique. For there is an abundance of native strength, sinew, and endurance in the average boy. More careful housing, larger playgrounds and open spaces, regular holidays and hours, and healthier work and food would produce a race of men as hardy as the dalesmen of the north, as elastic as the little men from Japan. Already on middle-aged fish and glutinous jam, some bodies and muscles are developed that are probably stronger than those of country boys. This minority of strong men goes to prove the physical possibility of the London lad, and to enforce the lament that so much strength is allowed to lie latent and undeveloped behind narrow chests and puny arms. The standards for an army or navy recruit might easily be raised in every direction, if the physical resources of the boy were brought into full play. At present there are many white faces that might be blooming, thousands of thin legs and arms that were meant to be strong, and a whole army of coughing, short-winded men who were born to be Olympic heroes. These men so unnecessarily weak rob the country of more than their own strength, for they hand on the curse of phthisis or nervous debility to another generation, and throw a fresh handicap in the scale that weighs down their children's chances. Yet many who bewail the lack of vitality in working people, and look gloomily into a future of spectacles, and crutches, and cotton-wool, have it in their power to save this waste of bone and sinew if they will. They can, privately as employers, or publicly as citizens, reduce, if not actually remove, the causes which turn lusty boys into weaklings, and sap the country of a hardy rank and file.

No less serious to the practical man is the leakage of mental power in the premature transition from boy to man. It is not confined to those extreme cases where a

boy of genuine ability, failing through some mischance to gain a scholarship, or forbidden by an over-cautious father to accept it, is forced to content himself with manual work. It is true that in every borough there are numerous examples of this suppressed capacity. Boys who might become classical scholars lick labels on to parcels for ten years, others who have literary gifts clean out a brewer's vat. Real thinkers work as porters in metal warehouses, and after shouldering iron fittings for eleven hours a day, find it difficult to set their minds in order. These are flagrant instances, not uncommon, but only forming a small proportion of the whole labouring class.

Yet with even the average boy there is a marked waste of mental capital between the ages of ten and thirty, and the aggregate of this loss to the country is heavy indeed. Ten years at school conquer many of the drawbacks at home, and discover a quick receptive mind in the normal child, eager for knowledge, and apt to reproduce. The size of the classes prevents full use being made of these undoubted powers, but the seventh standard boy is alert and intelligent, trained to work methodically and think quickly. Many opportunities have been lost in these years at school, but after fourteen there is a more disastrous relapse. The brain is not taxed again, and shrivels into a mere centre of limited formulæ, acting automatically in response to appetite or sensation. The boy at work sees more of the world, but though experience gives more material for thought, and might well suggest more knotty problems than before, he seems to use his mind less and less. His general education fails utterly. Asia is but a name that is difficult to spell, though at school he spoke of its rivers and ports with the familiarity of a hardy traveller. But he has not once thought of Asia since he gazed on the class-room map, and cheered in his heart the name of Florence Nightingale. It is probable that the vocabulary of the working man at forty is actually smaller than it was at fourteen, so shrunk is the power of the mind to feed upon the growing experience of life. The modern

educational system fails to grip the boy; having learnt to read and write, to understand history and geography, he should wish to use these gifts through life. But his ten years at school result in a very temporary access of ability, and the man of fifty is found but little more intelligent than his uneducated grandfather of pre-Victorian days.

Of the majority of boys it is true to say that only half their ability is ever used in the work they find to do on leaving school. The other half curls up and sleeps for ever. In tastes, pleasures, and manners the process is the same. Seventh standard boys enjoy Shakespeare and good music; in thirty years they will with difficulty remain awake under the ordeal. If the progress of the boy through the school could be maintained in any way, the electors of this country would be men of such high taste and intelligence, as to lay at rest all the fears of those who doubt democracy.

This waste of high average ability will only be checked by an increased watchfulness and breadth of outlook on the part of those who administer educational funds. As a school manager or a member of the County Educational Committee, as a worker on care committees or juvenile labour exchange committees, men or women with a little leisure who know that education neither begins nor ends with the class-room, can with infinite patience and discretion watch the unfolding possibilities of each child, and see that he reaches the highest level of life within his grasp. Regulation of the hours of boy-labour, the enforcing of evening classes between fourteen and eighteen, will some day strengthen the hands of these workers, and change the slope of life, so that a boy who has climbed to the top of his school, shall not then slide down into manhood, but continue to climb still higher. The workers on these school committees are labouring with rare enthusiasm in this direction, but their numbers might well be redoubled, and among them is a place for everyone who would save for this country the brain and talent of its normal children.

But the greatest riches of the river-side lie in the natural goodness of its people. In spite of every stupidity and

mistake, in spite of the failure and wreckage of weak souls, here, born of the struggle of life, unfold those lives of love and perseverance, that are to the traveller that has eyes to see as the golden furze on the bleakest slope of the mountain-side. Generosity touches a point reached nowhere else, and does so by the prompting of instinct, rather than as the result of exhortation and conscious virtue. The family may consist of ten very different people, who have little to say to each other, and are never demonstrative ; yet one member of it will support by his own wages all the others for many months, and will see nothing unselfish in the surrender of all his pocket-money. For he has only done an ordinary and expected thing, and does not look for gratitude or applause. The father or mother will go without the food the children want ; the elder brother will abstain that the younger one may eat, for it is an unwritten law that first the children must be fed.

It is almost as unquestionably a duty to support neighbours, though they may have moved to the street but a month before, and their name is barely known. The mother of the more prosperous home will not stop to consult her family, but will without hesitation help those who live above her or in the next house. She will not pay their rent, but she will lend odd shillings and give much food, never thinking of return. This is the most perfect charity. Wedding-presents are very rarely given, but no funeral of friend or relative can be allowed to pass without a wreath or cross of flowers. Sympathy in its most manifest forms comes from every house in the street, when accident or death falls on any family. Benefit concerts are always more successful than those for any other purpose. Collections for a "friend in need" or for a testimonial to a "friend indeed" occur monthly in every street. Money is given to objects and people most remote and unknown. No one finds it so hard to refuse food to the hungry as those who themselves have rarely had enough. To work and to suffer for others is a natural feature of every day. Without show and, seemingly, without trouble, the man

with two coats or two crusts gives one to a comparative stranger who has none. This is not quixotic, not marvellous or exacting in the eyes of the poor.

There are other signs of this fundamental goodness. Boys who lead a hard life at home and at work rarely speak of the struggle. Yet an occasional glimpse into a comfortless home reveals the uncomplaining hardiness of the boy, who, in the midst of every known temptation, keeps a steady course. Motherless children come to school all clean and tidy, cared for by an elder sister of sixteen, who herself must work ten hours a day. Mothers—but who can say what the mother does in the little home that is kept swept and garnished, where the children are clean and neat, while the wolf is kept from the door, by the mother's work? The fight against that despair, which, if it comes, brings dishonesty and perpetual untruth, is so stern for many, that their rigid adherence to a careful, virtuous life points to a rare vein of goodness in the strata of the river-side. For though poverty brings its quiver of temptations to all, attacking first one side and then another of a boy's humanity, and though few have the help of a positive and personal religion, yet the vast majority will never break the law or see a prison wall.

Does it, therefore, appear strange to some that with so much spontaneous and inbred straightness of living there should not be higher standards and a more general endeavour after purity and temperance—the respectable virtues of better folk? Perhaps. But they are like lilies in a muddy pool—these virtues in the river-side. Deep in the pool's turbid bottom they have their roots, and because they are stronger and more beautiful than the weeds that grow around them, they thrust their way to the slime-covered surface of the stagnant waters. Without the mud, their beauty would be less glorious; without the struggle, their strength less wonderful.

"All 's lend and borrow;
Good, see, wants evil;
Joy demands sorrow;
Angel weds devil."

Lilies here and there, yet a wilderness of mud, and many struggling weeds. Many lives there are like shafts of light in a dungeon, yet the fuller revelation of faith and power has still to come. There is here the same want of development; the moral strength of a nation hangs in the balance. For the material is very good. The nature of the people is essentially religious, and, in spite of all, their strongest traditions and instincts are in close accord with the spirit of Christianity. Perhaps for want of men the Church is able to lead but a few to a clearer knowledge of the faith that is theirs already; perhaps for want of insight she does not always see how far the water-side labourer has travelled along the road that leads to Calvary. Where there is much native kindness, there are foundations for a Christian life that shall reach and embrace every home, and there are signs that every man and woman will some day walk in the steady light of a personal certain faith in things unseen. In the meantime goodness abounds, but does not reach either its cause or its ideal.

Waste upon waste—in body, mind, and spirit. "One wrong more to man, one more insult to God." It is by economy in this wealth of our inheritance that England will survive competition, and stamp all history more deeply still with the impress of her worth. This aspect alone of the life across the bridges should stir each watchful patriot to the impatience that cries for knowledge. And knowledge alone can lead him to reform.

In this the appeal lies to the pocket of the business-loving Englishman. Let him see that there is no unnecessary leakage in the resources of the nation's humanity. But there is a deeper thought awakened by the sight of helpless infancy and stunted manhood. No one can look upon the way of life that lies before the child of the water-side without an uneasy shiver, as he reflects that in a sense he is allowing this order of things to continue without end. Patriotism has no meaning unless it implies fraternity; there can be no motherland without brotherhood. The flag of a country stands not for broad acres, or cliffs, or

castles, but for the men and women and children who make up a race. It is them that the flag, and all who honour it, must serve and protect. There are countless ties between those who use the same speech, see the same stars, and are fenced in by the same rough sea. The streets are common to all ; the flagstones on the embankment echo at night first under the tread of the Cabinet Minister on his way to Westminster, and a minute later will click under the loose shoe of some obsequious beggar, who was once an impudent boy. Black weeks in South Africa closed the disordered ranks of Englishmen at home. The fears and hopes of a country are all alike till they are divided by speech into rough and smooth. The paltry shillings in a rich man's pocket are not his for long ; they have been, and will again become, the riches of some boy, who must save two more, if he would go for a week to camp. Vast is the interchange between all men who shelter between the same seas. Great is the claim of the struggler upon the comfortable, when they kneel in the same church and worship the same God. And if the claim is great how serious the responsibility upon those who have, for the sufferings of those who have not. When satisfied that all is not well beyond the bridges, that his own countrymen are dying or drooping for want of a chance, the rich man dare not ask himself like Scrooge or Dives, whether it is his fault that things are so, and rest content with his own complacent answer that it is not his fault. If he is a man who has love for his country and a care for the future, he will first ask, what is wrong ? And then, after thought and scrutiny, will come a second and more searching question : What can I do to help ?

For although it is so manifestly true that all men in England have much in common, and it is still one race that makes the Empire great, yet the habits of a hundred years have done much to divorce masters and men. From this separation have arisen half the evils of poverty, and reform can only come through a union that is based on mutual sympathy and understanding.

The geography of every town makes the trouble abundantly clear, and nowhere is the separation so marked as in the City of London. The land of dividends is roughly in the West; beyond the Bank or across the bridges is a vast unknown land of wages. If only the houses of rich and poor lay side by side, and flats were also tenements, poverty would never have grown so baffling. The isolation of classes is carried much farther than this mere allocation of separate streets. The son from the West, having played in the seclusion of his own nursery, and walked in a padlocked square, is sent away to a school where he mixes with boys of the same kind. He makes his friends and forms his habits there in a community which only represents one thousandth part of the British people. He passes on to a University, where he makes more friends, and hardens his habits into a character. Yet here again he meets but the same thousandth part of the country that he had met before at school and at home. He is then sent forth to govern or play his part among a people of whom he knows but a tiny fraction. He continues his life in the same clean, unruffled circles. The members of his club are irreproachable; he is ill at ease in a restaurant where the best dinner costs sixpence. His cricket-club instinctively arranges fixtures with other clubs of the same temper. The only strugglers with whom he has spoken have been servants, waiters, clerks, and cabmen, and in each case the relation in which they stand to him has vitiated the chance of comradeship.

Thus arises a double ignorance. Rich and poor are at cross-purposes; neither can understand why the others say and do such unaccountable things, wear such odd clothes, or have such absurd tastes and prejudices. Evils have grown apace, and made life dark for the poor. Some of the rich do not yet know how dark that life has grown; others know, but do not see how they can do anything.

Before legislation can sweep boldly along the path of reform, the men who vote and the men who rule must have greater knowledge of each other's lives, or the laws

will be thoughtless, passionate, vindictive. Let some of those who are called to govern or administer learn in the school of fact, and not accept mere figures and reports as any substitute for the sight and knowledge of a poor man's life. Before they have framed policies and chosen parties, they would be wise to live in an ordinary street among poorer neighbours than they have hitherto known, not as philanthropists, but as learners and sharers, watching children grow into men, grieving over the quick fading of women's beauty, troubled by the dilapidation of the young loafer, thinking and wondering how all these things shall change.

The most urgent need in all social questions is for this knowledge and sympathy. There can be no great change that is safe and useful before this understanding between man and man has come. Though the sight of open misery and vice unashamed rouses the hearts of men, who must stand by, to passion and infinite longing, yet the most pressing duty is to wait. A change of spirit must come rather than a change of Government.

The horizon of the thousandth part, so secure within the porticoes of ugly Kensington and the buttresses of ancient schools and colleges, must first be widened to include in their survey of England the listless figures by the river-side. With a change of spirit and a widening of horizon will come a sense of trouble, and shame, and responsibility. And with a feeling of responsibility will arise an anxiety to arise and learn, and then at last will come the knowledge that gives a broad basis for reform.

Yet legislation will not then prove to be the greatest agent in the deliverance of the underfed and overworked. For deliverance will not come from a thousand laws or constitutions, but only by the growth of a race of a thousand parents and employers, good landlords and builders. As men grow, constitutions crumble. For if there came this new spirit upon the country, not merely the rulers, but every man who walked on carpets, would recast his relations with all those who served him. The landlord

and builder would raise their ideals and methods; the employer would be at infinite pains to govern his small kingdom with thought and understanding; the officer would learn to serve and study his men, knowing that discipline is barren without guidance and interest. The man with youth and energy would devote a generous measure of spare time to the supervision of games and clubs, or take a modest place on labour exchange or care committees. Knowledge and service act and react upon each other. For the man who begins to know something of another's need wants to do something, and anything that he does will bring him into further contact with those he seeks to know.

It is by the different point of view in the average man, by an accumulation of small differences in his dealings with others, that the new heaven and earth will come, rather than by any sweeping measure of compulsion or restraint.

The first great struggle is for men to realize that across the bridges there is a great need, which is a reproach to their common sense because it is a great waste of strength and goodness, and to their manliness because it is unutterably sad. Some, moreover, need to learn that there is a bridge, after all, which will bear them to these countless homes of poverty. They will find the way across the river if they come, natural and unassuming, with a pure heart and ready hand, anxious only to serve and learn. They cross, perhaps, in fear and wonder, but find on the other side a happiness which makes them stay. They meet there gentler spirits with more indomitable courage than their own, and others who are more weak and sinful than they can understand; slowly they begin to share and join hands with all, and in the end rejoice that they are as other men.

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